

**ICE, CLOUD, and Land Elevation Satellite-2  
(ICESat-2) Project**

**Algorithm Theoretical Basis Document (ATBD)  
for  
Land Ice Along-Track Height Product (ATL06)**

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**Abstract**

This document describes the theoretical basis of the land ice height processing algorithms and the products that are produced by the ICESat-2 mission. It includes descriptions of the parameters that are provided with each product as well as ancillary geophysical parameters used in the derivation of the products.

## **CM Foreword**

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## **Preface**

This document is the Algorithm Theoretical Basis Document for the TBD processing to be implemented at the ICESat-2 Science Investigator-led Processing System (SIPS). The SIPS supports the ATLAS (Advance Topographic Laser Altimeter System) instrument on the ICESat-2 Spacecraft and encompasses the ATLAS Science Algorithm Software (ASAS) and the Scheduling and Data Management System (SDMS). The science algorithm software will produce Level 0 through Level 4 standard data products as well as the associated product quality assessments and metadata information.

The ICESat-2 Science Development Team, in support of the ICESat-2 Project Science Office (PSO), assumes responsibility for this document and updates it, as required, as algorithms are refined or to meet the needs of the ICESat-2 SIPS. Reviews of this document are performed when appropriate and as needed updates to this document are made. Changes to this document will be made by complete revision.

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**Change History Log**

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5.0	Removed the parameter $h_{robust\_sprd}$ from the <i>ATL06_quality_summary</i> flag; updated Figures 8-1 and 8-2.	

**List of TBDs/TBRs**

Item No.	Location	Summary	Ind./Org.	Due Date

**Table of Contents**

Abstract .....	ii
CM Foreword.....	iii
Preface .....	iv
Review/Approval Page .....	v
Change History Log .....	vi
List of TBDs/TBRs .....	vii
Table of Contents .....	viii
List of Figures .....	xi
List of Tables .....	xii
1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION and OVERVIEW .....	2
2.1 Background .....	2
2.2 Physical Basis of Measurements .....	4
2.2.1 Height retrieval over approximately planar surfaces .....	4
2.3 Potential Errors .....	6
2.4 Land-ice Level-3 products: ATL06: Land-Ice Height .....	6
3 ALGORITHM THEORY: Derivation of ATL06 Land Ice Height Parameters .....	8
1.1 Representation of the surface .....	8
3.1.1 Land-ice height definition .....	10
3.2 Outline of processing .....	11
3.3 PE selection .....	11
3.3.1 Along-track segments .....	11
3.3.2 Local Coordinate Systems .....	14
3.3.3 Parameters describing selected PEs .....	15
3.3.4 Handling of invalid segments .....	19
3.3.5 Surface-window refinement and least-squares height estimate .....	20
3.4 First-Photon Bias .....	22
3.4.1 Mathematical Description for the First-Photon Bias .....	23
3.4.2 Correction Formulation for the First-Photon Bias .....	24
3.4.3 Statistics Derived from the First-Photon-Bias Correction .....	25
3.5 Transmit-pulse shape correction .....	30



3.6	Signal, Noise, and Error Estimates .....	32
3.6.1	Background PE rate .....	32
3.6.2	Signal PE count.....	33
3.6.3	Per-Photon Errors.....	33
3.6.4	Propagated Height Errors:.....	34
3.6.5	Uncorrected reflectance .....	34
3.7	Across-track slope calculation .....	35
3.8	Subsurface-Scattering Bias .....	35
3.9	Atmospheric-Scattering Bias .....	36
3.10	Segment geolocation .....	36
3.11	Noise-corrected robust estimators of spread .....	37
4	ATL06 Data product description .....	40
4.1	Data Granules.....	40
4.2	Segment_quality group .....	41
4.2.1	Signal_selection_status subgroup .....	42
4.3	<i>Land_ice_segments</i> group.....	42
4.3.1	geophysical subgroup.....	45
4.3.2	ground_track subgroup .....	48
4.3.3	bias_correction subgroup .....	50
4.3.4	fit_statistics subgroup .....	51
4.3.5	<i>DEM</i> subgroup.....	53
4.4	<i>residual_histogram</i> group.....	54
5	ALGORITHM IMPLEMENTATION: Land Ice Height (ATL 06/L3A).....	57
5.1	Outline of Procedure .....	57
5.2	Input Parameters .....	57
5.3	Processing Procedure for Parameters.....	60
5.4	Top-Level Fitting Routine .....	61
5.5	Signal selection based on ATL03 flags .....	66
5.6	Backup PE-selection routine.....	67
5.7	Iterative Least-Squares Fitting Routine .....	69
5.8	Robust dispersion calculation from a collection of points, not including a background estimate .....	73

5.9	Robust dispersion calculation from a collection of points, including a background estimate .....	73
5.10	First- Photon Bias Correction .....	74
5.11	Gain-corrected median .....	75
5.12	Gain-corrected mean .....	77
5.13	Transmit-pulse-shape correction .....	78
5.14	Residual_histogram calculation .....	79
5.15	Transmit-echo-pulse initialization .....	81
6	TEST DATA AND SOFTWARE REQUIREMENTS .....	83
6.1	ATL06 Test Data Setup .....	83
7	Browse Products and Q/A statistics .....	84
7.1	Browse Products .....	84
7.2	Q/A Statistics .....	84
8	Appendix A: Glossary .....	85
	Glossary/Acronyms .....	91
	References .....	93

**List of Figures**

<u>Figure</u>	<u>Page</u>
Figure 2-1. ICESat-2 repeat-track schematic .....	3
Figure 2-2. Schematic of returns from different surface types .....	5
Figure 3-1. Surface return shape .....	8
Figure 3-2. Mean and median height biases .....	9
Figure 3-3. Reference point numbering schematic .....	11
Figure 3-4. Example PE selection.....	13
Figure 3-5. RGT coordinates .....	14
Figure 3-6 Segment fitting .....	15
Figure 3-7. First-photon bias correction .....	22
Figure 3-8. Accuracy of first-photon bias correction elevation recovery .....	27
Figure 3-9. Accuracy of first-photon-bias-correction signal strength recovery .....	28
Figure 3-10. Transmit-pulse-shape correction .....	30
Figure 5-1. Flow chart for top-level ATL06 processing.....	60
Figure 5-2. Flow chart for iterative ground fit.....	69
Figure 8-1. Spots and tracks, forward flight .....	88
Figure 8-2. Spots and tracks, forward flight .....	89

## **List of Tables**

<u>Table</u>	<u>Page</u>
Table 3-1 <i>signal_selection_source</i> values .....	17
Table 3-2 Status parameters for signal-selection algorithms .....	18
Table 4-1 <i>Segment_quality</i> group .....	41
Table 4-2 <i>land_ice_segments</i> group .....	42
Table 4-3 Segment characteristics for <i>ATL06_quality_summary</i> to be zero .....	44
Table 4-4 <i>geophysical</i> subgroup .....	46
Table 4-5 <i>ground_track</i> subgroup .....	49
Table 4-6 <i>bias_correction</i> subgroup .....	50
Table 4-7 <i>fit_statistics</i> subgroup .....	51
Table 4-8 <i>DEM</i> subgroup.....	53
Table 4-9 Parameters in the <i>residual_histogram</i> group.....	55
Table 5-1. Inputs for ATL06.....	58

# 1 INTRODUCTION

This document describes the theoretical basis and implementation of the level-3 land-ice processing algorithms. It currently includes ATL06, which provides geolocated land-ice surface heights, and ATL11, which provides time series of surface heights. The higher-level products, providing mapped height, and mapped height change will be described in supplements to this document available 2021.

The ATL06 product provides the most basic derived values from the ATLAS instrument on ICESat-2: the surface height at a given point on Earth's surface at a given time relative to the WGS-84 ellipsoid. ATL06 provides estimates of the ice-sheet surface height, and ancillary parameters needed to interpret and assess the quality of these height estimates. ATL06 heights represent the mean surface height averaged along 40-m segments of ground track, 20-m apart, for each of ATLAS's six beams. Segments within adjacent beams are aligned to facilitate estimation of the across-track surface slope; they are also aligned from orbit to orbit so that subsequent repeat tracks give height estimates for nearly the same location on the surface, simplifying the estimation of height changes made through repeat-track analysis. Height estimates from ATL06 can also be compared with other geodetic data and used as inputs to higher-level ICESat-2 products, particularly ATL11, 14, and 15.

Higher-level products are based on the height estimates in ATL06. ATL11 provides heights corrected for displacements between the reference tracks and the location of the ATLAS measurements. ATL14 provides gridded height maps for selected epochs during the mission, based on the corrected heights in ATL11. ATL15 provides height-change maps based on the ATL14 height maps and height differences derived from ATL11.

In this document, Section 2 provides an overview of land-ice products and gives a brief summary of the procedures used to derive products

Section 3 describes the algorithm used to generate the products.

Section 4 gives the processing steps and input data required to derive each parameter, and describes the products in detail.

Section 5 gives a detailed procedure for deriving selected parameters

Section 6 describes test data and specific tests that NASA's implementation of the algorithm should pass.

## **2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND OVERVIEW**

This section provides a conceptual description of ICESat-2's ice-sheet height measurements and gives a brief description of the derived products.

### **2.1 Background**

ATLAS on ICESat-2 determines the range between the satellite and the Earth's surface by measuring the two-way time delay of short pulses of laser light that it transmits in six beams. It is different from previous operational ice-sheet altimeters in that it uses a photon-counting detector. Previous altimeters (e.g. GLAS on ICESat-1, ATM, and LVIS) have used full-waveform digitizers that received millions or more photons for each transmitted pulse, allowing the receiver to generate a waveform, *i.e.* the return power as a function of time. ATLAS instead records a set of arrival times for individual photons, which are then analyzed to derive surface, vegetation, and cloud properties. Although ATLAS measures much weaker signals than full-waveform altimeters, it has three major design advantages over GLAS:

- i) ATLAS has six beams arranged in three pairs (Figure 2-1), so that it samples each of three reference pair tracks with a pair of beams;
- ii) ATLAS transmits pulses at 10 kHz, giving approximately one pulse every 0.7 m along track, more than two orders of magnitude finer than the 170-meter along-track of GLAS;
- iii) ATLAS's expected pointing control will be better than 90 m RMS, better than the 100-200 m achieved by ICESat-1.

ATLAS's six beams are spread over a small angle so that their projection onto the surface of the earth is a rectangular array with two rows and three columns, with about 3.3 km separation between each column and its neighbors, and 2.5 km between the rows. As ICESat-2 moves along its orbit, the ATLAS beams illuminate six tracks on the Earth's surface; the array is rotated slightly with respect to the satellite's flight direction so that tracks for the fore and aft beams in each column produce pairs of tracks, each pair separated by about 90 m (Figure 2-1). The separation between beams in each pair allows for measurement of the local surface slope in the across-track and along-track direction; this will allow ICESat-2 to make the most precise and detailed repeat estimates of ice-sheet height of any satellite to date.

ATLAS pulses are short, about 1.6 ns long (FWHM), and are transmitted every 0.1 ms (10 kHz); this fast repetition yields footprint centers separated by about 0.7 m in the along-track direction. Each pulse illuminates an approximately circular area on the ground ~17 m in diameter. ATLAS's strong beams detect at most 12 reflected photons from each transmitted pulse. Great care is taken to detect only photons with the same wavelength as the transmitted laser pulse and to limit the field of view of the detectors to a region slightly larger than the illuminated "footprint" of each beam; therefore, ground-return photon events (PEs, meaning photons that are detected) may readily be distinguished from solar background PEs because they are clustered in time, while background PEs are distributed evenly in time and arrive much less frequently.

The high (~45-meter RMS) accuracy of ICESat-2's pointing control means that pairs for consecutive repeats of each RPT (Reference Pair Track) are likely to overlap. The fine along-

track sampling and the multi-beam capability allow height products to be defined for segments that are consistent in along-track position for repeated measurements along the same RPT.

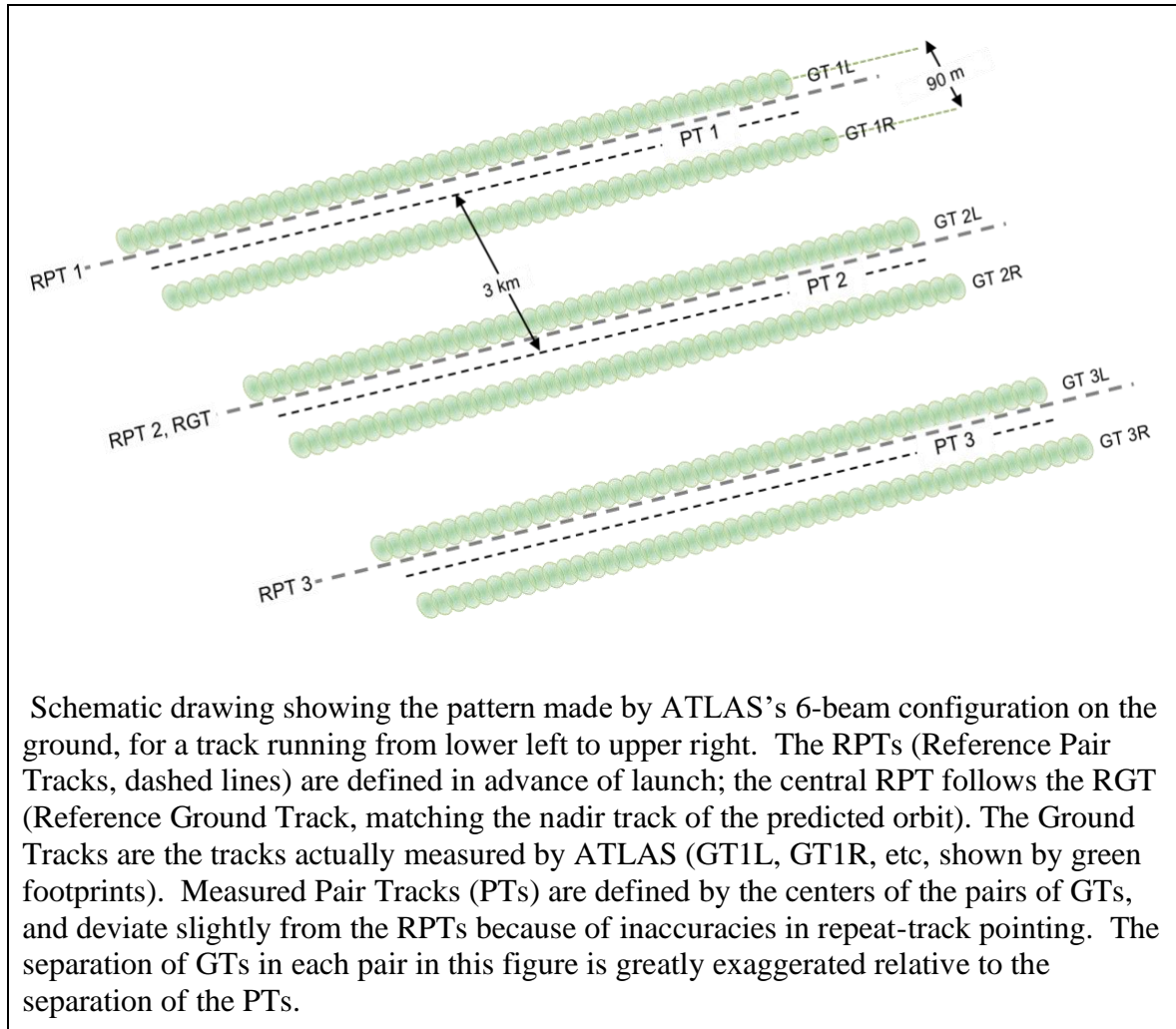


Figure 2-1. ICESat-2 repeat-track schematic

Further processing of ATL06 heights will produce heights corrected for surface slope and curvature that give the estimated time-varying height for selected points on the RPTs and at track-to-track crossover points (ATL11). These shape-corrected heights will be processed further to give i) height maps for selected time intervals (semi-annual or annual, ATL14) and ii) annual height-change maps for the Antarctic and Greenland ice sheets (ATL15)

## 2.2 Physical Basis of Measurements

### 2.2.1 Height retrieval over approximately planar surfaces

Light from the ATLAS lasers reaches the earth's surface as flat disks of down-traveling photons, approximately 50 cm in vertical extent, and spread over about 17 m horizontally. On land ice, photons are scattered once, or many times, by snow and ice grains, into every direction, including towards the satellite; a tiny fraction return to the ATLAS telescope's focal plane, and a few of these are counted by the detector electronics and recorded as Photon Events (PEs). Over the vast majority of the earth's land ice, the surface is smooth, with small (single-degree) variations in surface slopes at scales less than a few hundred meters. This allows us to approximate the surface profiles measured by ATLAS with short linear segments. We aggregate PEs received by ATLAS into 50% overlapping along-track segments of a fixed length (40 m), whose centers are 20 m apart. We then fit these PEs with sloping line segments; for each segment, we estimate both the along-track slope and the height at the center of the segment. When both beams in a pair provide height measurements, we also calculate the across-track slope for the pair. Any height variation not captured by this fitting process will be treated as surface roughness.

The time variation in surface height is determined by fitting a simple spatial function to the heights from multiple repeat measurements, and using this function to correct the measurements for the height variations caused by spatial sampling of sloped and curving surfaces. This function is fit to the subset of the repeat measurements that we assess to be of the highest quality, but corrected height estimates are provided for all available repeats, and data-quality metrics are provided to allow users to decide which heights to use.

### 2.2.2 Effects of surface slope and roughness

Figure 2-2 shows how slope and roughness contribute to the shape of the return pulse. For many areas of glaciers, the ground may be treated as a rough planar surface, and the laser pulse as having a Gaussian distribution in space, with intensity falling to  $1/e^2$  of its peak value over a distance  $W/2$ . The laser pulses also have an approximate Gaussian distribution in time, with standard deviation  $\sigma_{tx}$ . If the incident beam is not parallel to the surface normal, photons from the edge of the footprint farthest from the satellite will be delayed relative to photons from the edge nearest the satellite. At the same time, a rough surface will yield early photons and late photons, further spreading the returned photons. If the angle between the beam and the surface normal is  $\varphi$ , and the surface height within the footprint has a Gaussian distribution with RMS deviation  $R$  relative to the plane of the surface, then the measured temporal distribution of the returned photons will be Gaussian as well (Yi & Bentley, 1999), with a temporal standard deviation equal to the quadratic sum of the spreads due to the transmitted pulse, the surface slope, and the roughness:

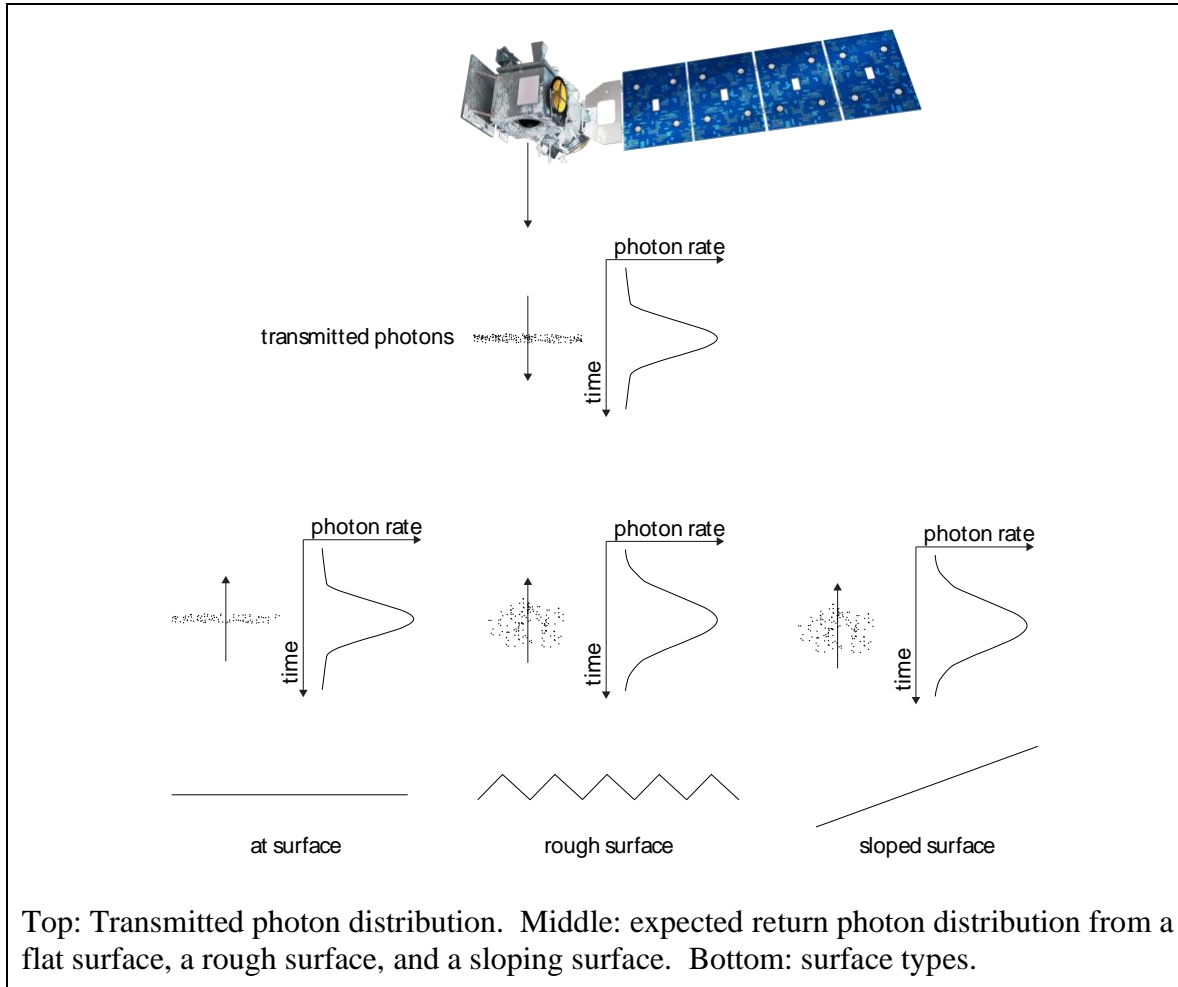
$$\sigma_R = \left[ \sigma_{tx}^2 + \left( \frac{2\sigma_{beam}}{c} \tan\varphi \right)^2 + \left( \frac{2R}{c} \right)^2 \right]^{1/2} \quad 1$$

For ATLAS,  $\sigma_{beam}$  is expected to be around 4.25 m (one quarter of  $W$ ), and  $\sigma_{tx}$  around 0.68 ns, corresponding to a FWHM (Full Width at Half Maximum) of 1.6 ns, so spreading due to sloping



121 surfaces will be smaller than the transmit-pulse duration for slopes up to approximately 1.3  
122 degrees.

Figure 2-2. Schematic of returns from different surface types



123 Surface roughness on a 17-m scale is likely to be small except in heavily crevassed glacier  
124 margins and in heavily channeled ablation zones. Although analysis of the return pulse shape  
125 does not allow us to distinguish the effects of roughness from those of slope, the geometry of  
126 ATLAS's tracks, with pairs of beams separated by 90 m, allows estimates of the across-track  
127 slope at scales modestly larger than a single footprint, while the along-track component of the  
128 slope can be estimated from the along-track sequence of heights.

### 129 2.2.3 Distinguishing return PEs and background PEs

130 At the same time as signal photons are received by the ATLAS detector, background photons  
131 from sunlight are continually entering the telescope. Most of these are eliminated by filters that  
132 allow only photons with wavelengths close to the laser wavelengths through, but some pass these  
133 filters, and their timing is also recorded. The time distribution of the returned signal photons  
134 depends on the geometry and reflectance of the ice surface, and on scattering and attenuation in  
135 the atmosphere. We distinguish signal PEs from background PEs by their clustering in time.

Sunlight scattered from bright (*i.e.* snow-covered) surfaces will produce detected PEs at rates up to around 12 MHz. For comparison, a return with as few as three PEs distributed over one half meter of range produces a brief return rate of 900 MHz. Signal returns are also distinct from the background because they are spatially contiguous, so that PEs will be clustered in time in a consistent way from one shot to the next.

### **2.3 Potential Errors**

Errors in ATLAS land-ice products can come from a variety of sources:

- 1) Sampling error: ATLAS height estimates are based on a random sampling of the surface height distribution;
- 2) Background noise: Random-noise PEs are mixed with the signal PEs, so sampled PEs will include random outliers;
- 3) Complex topography: The along-track linear fit and across-track polynomial fit do not always resolve complex surface topography.
- 4) Misidentified PEs: The ATL03 product will not always identify the correct PEs as signal PEs;
- 5) First-photon bias: This is an error inherent to photon-counting detectors that results in a high bias in the mean detected PE height that depends on signal strength;
- 6) Atmospheric forward scattering: Photons traveling downward through a cloudy atmosphere may be scattered through small angles but still be reflected by the surface within the ATLAS field of view; these will be delayed, producing an apparently lower surface;
- 7) Subsurface scattering: Photons may be scattered many times within ice or snow before returning to the detector; these will be delayed, producing a surface estimate with a low bias.

These errors are each treated in a different way during the ATL06 processing:

- 1) and 2) are treated as random errors, and their effects are quantified in the error estimates associated with the products.
- 3) and 4) will produce relatively large errors, and will need to be addressed with consistency checks on the data during the generation of higher-level products.
- 5) will be corrected routinely during ATL06 processing (see Section 3.0).
- 6) and 7) require information about cloud structure and ice-surface conditions that will not be available at the time of processing of ATL06. Correcting for these errors remains an active avenue for research.

### **2.4 Land-ice Level-3 products: ATL06: Land-Ice Height**

The ATL06 product provides surface height estimates organized by reference -pair track (RPT), in a format designed to facilitate comparison between different repeat measurements on the same RPT. It also combines information from the two beams in each PT to give across-track slope estimates. A variety of parameters are provided that indicate the quality of the surface-height estimates and the signal and noise levels associated with the measurement. Note that in cycles 1

and 2 of the mission, ICESat-2 did not point at the RPTS, and ICESat2's pairs are offset by up to 2 km from the RPT locations. The first cycle that was collected over the RPTS was the third.

We define ATL06 heights based on fits of a linear model to ATL03 height data from short (40 m) segments of the ground track, centered on reference points spaced at 20-m intervals along-track. We refer to height estimates for these short segments as "segment heights", and segment's horizontal location is that of the reference point, displaced in a direction perpendicular to the RGT to match the GT offset. The choice of 40 m for the segment length provides data from slightly more than two independent (non-overlapping) ATL03 heights (based on 17-m footprints) for the along-track slope estimate, so that this component of the slope can be eliminated as a cause of vertical scatter in the PE height distribution. The spacing between reference points is 20 m, so that each segment overlaps its neighbors by 50%. Defining overlapping segments in this way increases the chances that a segment will overlap a locally smooth area within a crevasse field, potentially improving elevation-rate recovery in these areas.

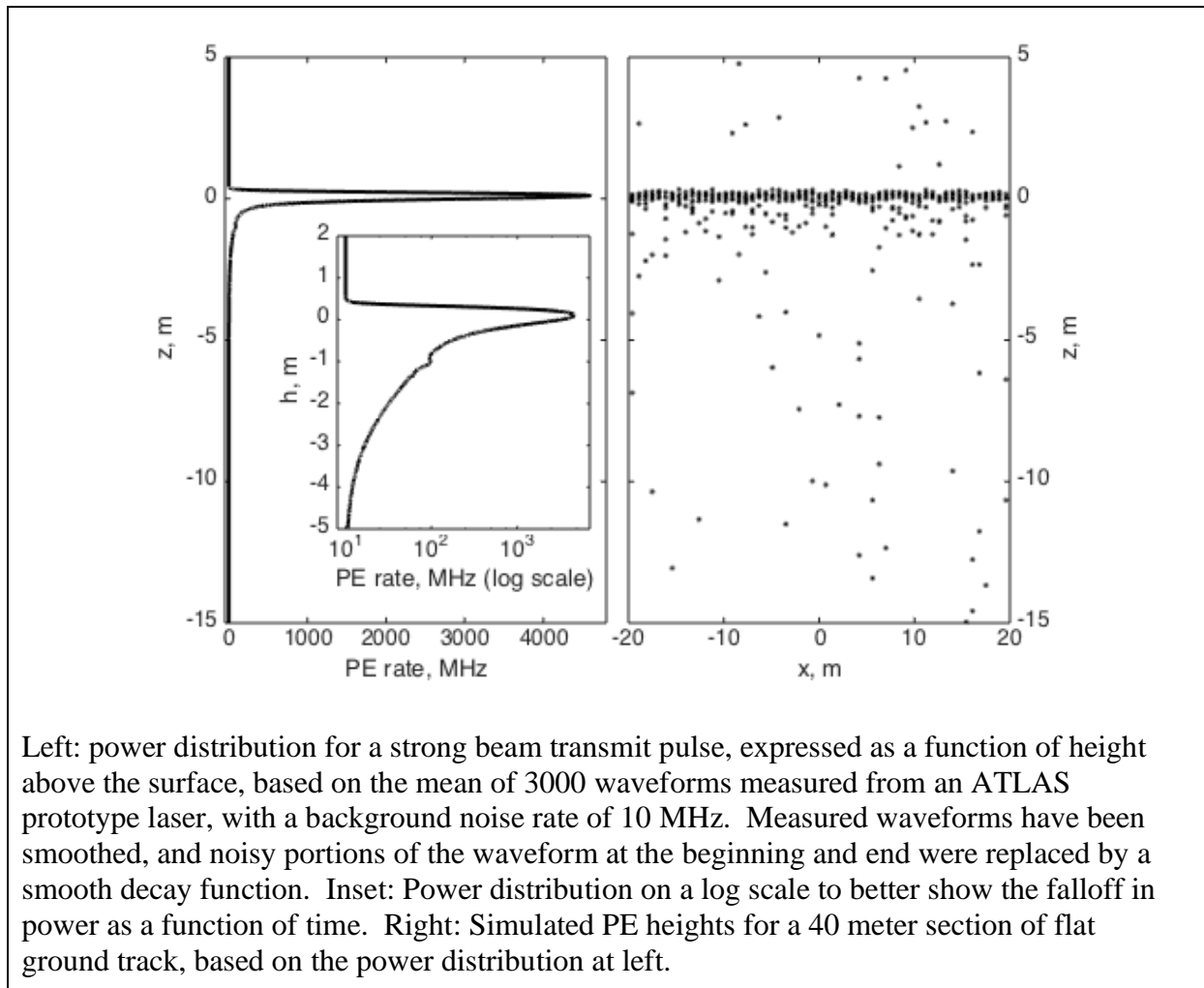
We use the same along-track sampling for both beams in each beam pair, and, for each cycle, use the same reference point each time we calculate a segment height. This allows for direct comparison between segment heights from the same RPT, without the need to interpolate in the along-track direction. The ATL03 PE used for each segment can be determined by associating the `/gtxx/land_ice_segments/segment_id` parameter in ATL06 with the `/gtxx/geolocation/segment_id` parameter in ATL03: segment  $m$  in ATL06 includes PEs from ATL03 segments  $m-1$  and  $m$  (here  $xx$  represents the ATLAS beam, with `gt1l` and `gt1r` providing the left and right beams for pair 1).

A minimal representation of the data is given in datasets in the ATL06 product in the `/gtxx/land_ice_segments` groups. In these groups, we give the latitude, longitude, height, slope, vertical error estimate, and a quality flag for each segment. This represents the minimum set of parameters needed by most users; a wide variety of parameters describing the segment fit, the input data, and the environmental conditions for the data are available in the subgroups within the `gtxx` groups.

### 3 ALGORITHM THEORY: DERIVATION OF ATL06 LAND ICE HEIGHT PARAMETERS

In this section, we describe the ATL06 height derivation from lower-level ATLAS data (primarily the PE heights, locations, and times provided by ATL03). This process provides height estimates and segment geolocations for a set of points (called reference points) spaced every 20 m along each of ATLAS's pair tracks. One height is calculated for each beam in each pair, for each reference point, for each cycle of ICESat-2's orbit.

Figure 3-1. Surface return shape

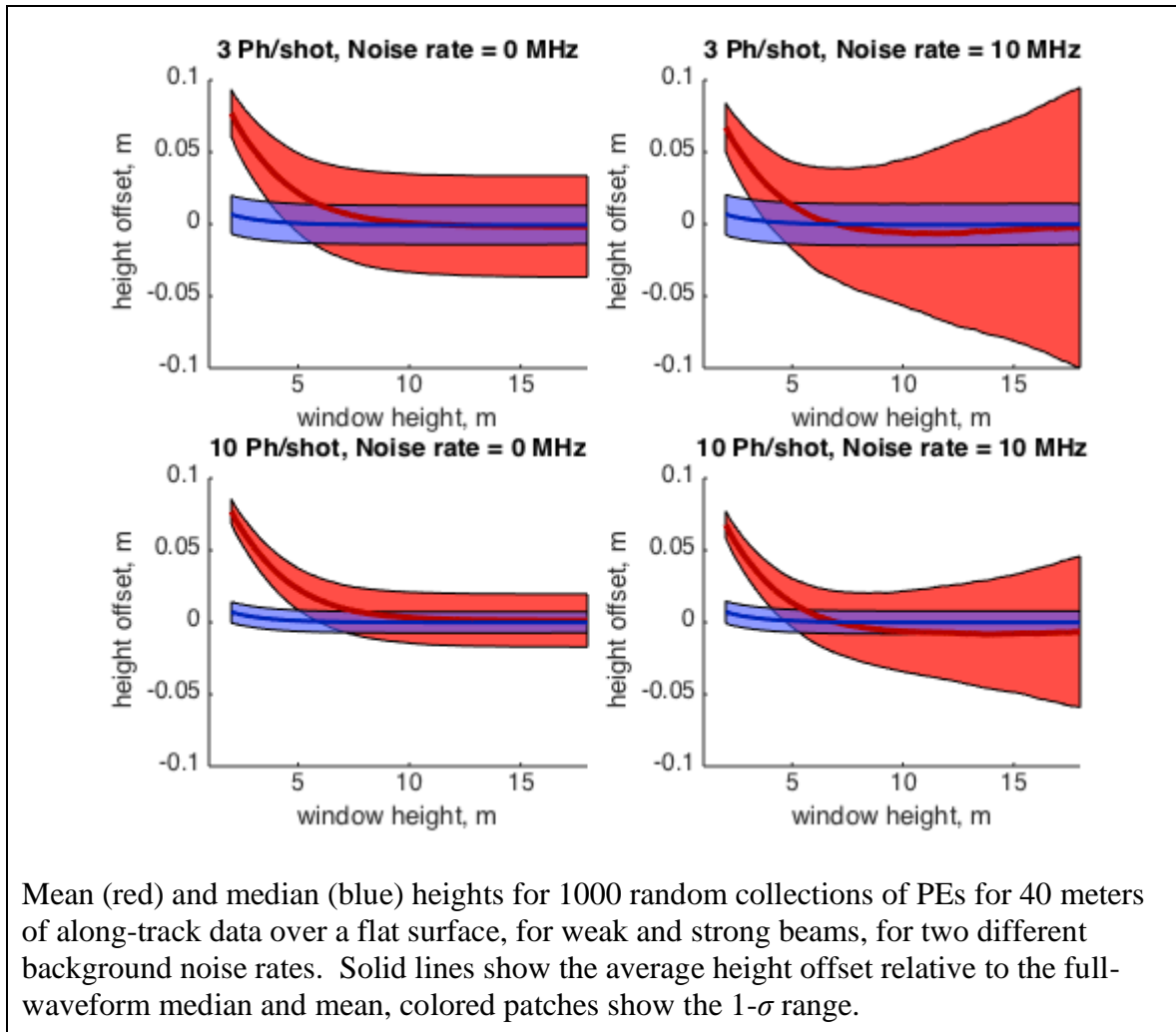


#### 1.1 Representation of the surface

Figure 3-1 shows the expected surface-return power as a function of height above the surface, based on waveforms measured from a prototype ATLAS laser, for sunlit ice-sheet conditions with a background PE rate of 10 MHz, and a random set of photon heights generated based on

this waveform for a 40-meter along-track segment. The return has a sharp peak in power at the ground, but it is asymmetric, with a leading edge (on the +z side) that is sharper than the trailing edge (on the -z side), and with a long ‘tail’ of energy on the -z side caused by a slow decay in laser power at the end of the pulse. This produces a dense collection of PEs at the surface height, with scattered PEs above and below, some of which come from the sun and some of which come from the tail of the waveform.

Figure 3-2. Mean and median height biases



One way to characterize the surface height for this segment would be to calculate the mean of all PE heights within a pre-determined height range (the ‘surface window’). For simplicity, one might choose a large surface window of 10-20 m to ensure the capture of all return PEs. However, this choice would lead to significant noise and potential bias in the estimated surface heights. The noise would come about because the mean of a distribution of heights is sensitive to the extreme values of the distribution, so the photons at the edge of the distribution would produce sampling errors in the recovered heights. The bias could come about if the shape of the

transmit pulse were to change over time, because of temperature changes or because of aging of the lasers. If this were to happen, the mean recovered surface height could change even if the true surface height did not, again because the mean is sensitive to outlying data. Figure 3-2 shows the expected bias and scatter magnitudes as a function of the width of the surface window for the means of 1000 random collections of PEs based on the waveform in Figure 3-1. Selecting a small surface window results in a narrow (2 cm or less) scatter of values around the mean, because the range of PE heights in the window is small. However, this leads to a 7-8 cm bias in the surface height, because the tail of the distribution is cut off. Selecting a large surface window leads to a small bias, but, particularly when background noise is large, it leads to scatter in the surface heights, potentially as large as  $\pm 10$  cm.

We ameliorate this problem in two ways: First, we use an iterative process to select a small surface window that includes the majority of the signal PEs but few background PEs. Second, we express the surface height as the median of the PE heights within the surface window. We select the median instead of the mean because it is less sensitive to sampling error for distributions containing a uniform, ‘background’ component. Median height offsets shown in Figure 3-1 have a spread of less than 2 cm, have maximum biases less than 7 mm, and are nearly independent of the surface-window height. This represents a large improvement in accuracy and precision over the mean, and further processing (discussed in 3.5) can correct for the remaining bias in the median heights.

In the course of processing photon-counting data, we frequently need to estimate the spread of a distribution of PE heights. For other types of data, we might choose to make this estimate based on the standard deviation of the sample of heights, but because our measurements contain a mixture of signal and noise PEs, the standard deviation often overestimates the spread of the data. Instead, we generally use the RDE (Robust Dispersion Estimator), which is equal to half the difference between the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 84<sup>th</sup> percentiles of a distribution. For Gaussian-distributed data, this statistic is approximately equal to the standard deviation, and for data containing a mixture of a large fraction of signal and a small fraction of noise, it can give an estimate of the spread of the signal that is relatively insensitive to the noise. In some cases, we use a version of this statistic that estimates the spread of the signal component of a distribution that contains a mixture signal (Gaussian- or near-Gaussian-distributed) PEs and background (uniformly distributed) PEs. In these cases, we estimate the 50<sup>th</sup> and 75<sup>th</sup> percentiles of the signal component and scale the difference between these percentiles based on the expected width of these percentiles for a Gaussian distribution. We refer to this measure as “robust spread including background” and describe its implementation in section 5.

### **3.1.1 Land-ice height definition**

The land-ice height is defined as estimated surface height of the segment center for each reference point, using median-based statistics. We calculate this the sum of the least-squares height fit, the first-photon-bias median correction, and the pulse-truncation median correction. Height increment values on the product allow removal of the corrections and calculation of the segment mean height, and first-photon-bias and pulse-truncation corrections appropriate to the segment mean.

## 3.2 Outline of processing

The outline of the process is as follows for each cycle for each along-track point. First, heights and along-track slopes are calculated for each beam in each pair:

1. PEs from the current cycle falling into the along-track bin for the along-track point are collected (3.3)
2. The heights and surface windows are iteratively refined (3.3.5.2)
3. Corrections and error estimates are calculated based on the edited PEs. ( 3.4, 3.5, 3.6 )

Once these steps are complete, based on the height values for the two beams,

4. The across-track slope is calculated (3.7)

Each of these steps is described in turn below.

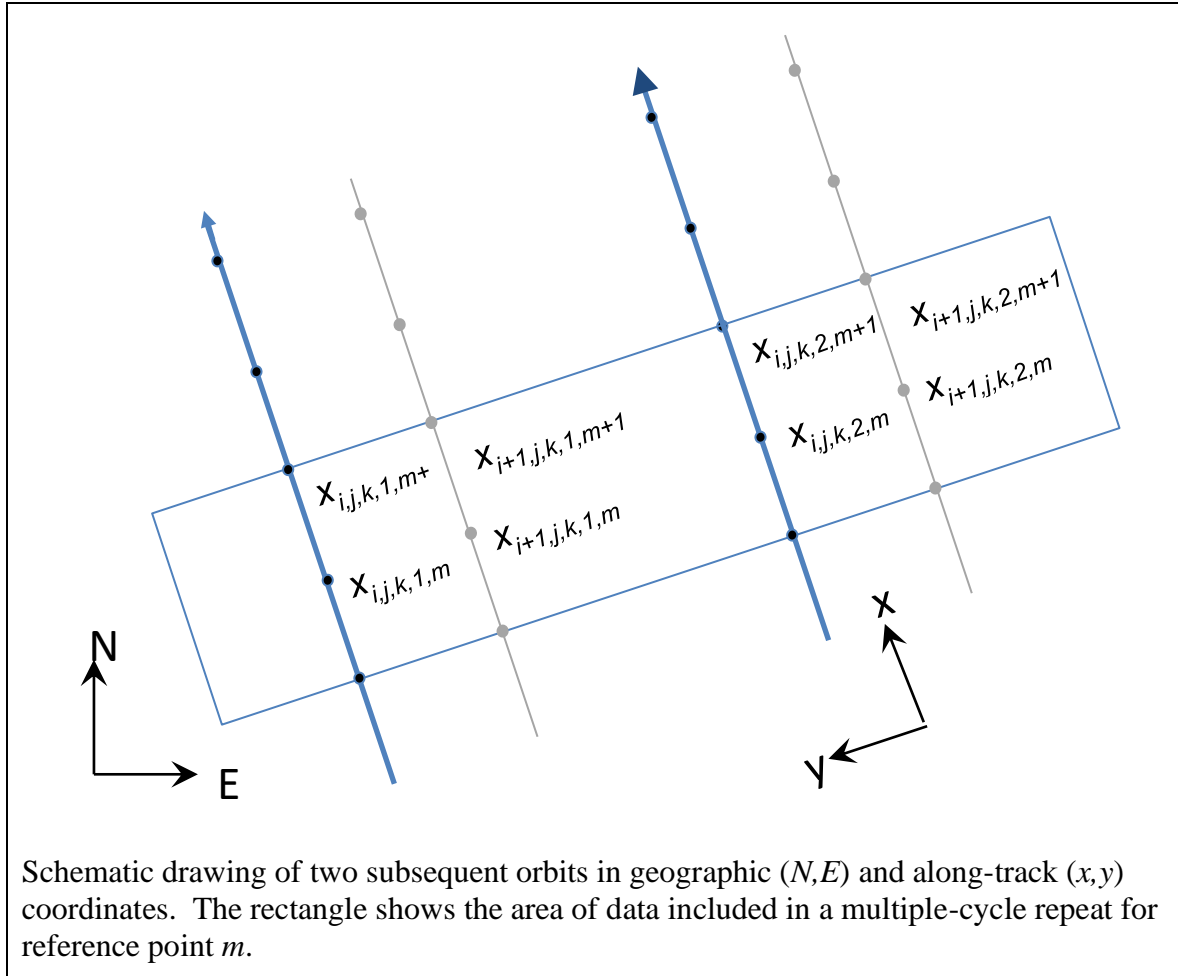
## 3.3 PE selection

ATL03 provides PE locations and timings for each beam. The first step in ATL06 processing is to select groups of PEs that determine the segment height at each along-track point. Processing is only carried out if the ATL03 *podppd\_flag* indicates that the PE geolocation was of high quality for all pulses in the segment, otherwise the segment is skipped.

### 3.3.1 Along-track segments

Our height- and height-change schemes rely on dividing the data into repeatable along-track segments. We define these segments relative to the pre-defined RGT (see ATL06 Appendix A for definitions related to the ICESat-2 ground and reference tracks) and use them to select groups of PEs for each beam and each pass, and to define local coordinates relative to the RGT. We define a set of reference points, spaced every 20 m in the along-track coordinate  $x$  along the RGT, which specify the locations of the height estimates reported in ATL06. One set of reference points is defined for each RPT (Reference Pair Track). An ATL06 segment of data includes all PEs whose  $x$  coordinates are within approximately 20 m of that of a given reference point, for a total length of 40 m, so that each segment overlaps its neighbors by 50%. Each individual segment is fit with a least-squares model that gives the slope and height of the segment (Figure 3-3 and Section 3.1.2.4), and height corrections are derived based on the residuals to this model.

Figure 3-3. Reference point numbering schematic



298

299 Along-track segments are designated by five subscripts (Figure 3-3):

300 -i, the cycle number, numbered from the start of the mission;

301 -j, the track number, numbered consecutively within the cycle;

302 -k, the pair number, numbered from left to right across the satellite swath;

303 -l, the beam number within the pair, numbered from left to right;

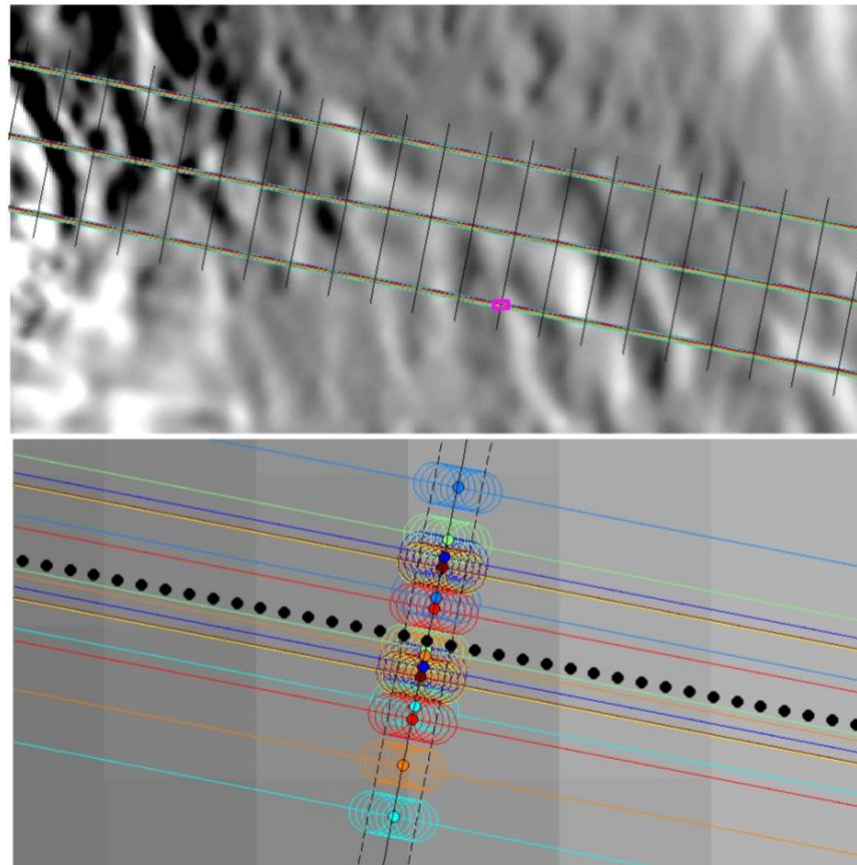
304 -m, the reference point number, counted from the equator crossing of the RGT.

305 An along-track repeat measurement for a segment is made up of segments with the same  $j$ ,  $k$ , and  
 306  $m$ , meaning that the track, the pair, and the along-track coordinates of the measurements are the



307 same. Each cycle,  $i$ , contributes measurements from two beams, with different  $l$  values, to the  
 308 repeat; these different measurements allow the across-track slope to be constrained  
 309 independently from the height change, and the along-track segment fitting procedure allows us to  
 310 correct for the along-track slope. Both ATL03 and ATL06 use this segment numbering scheme;  
 311 however, ATL06 segments are 40 m long and overlap their neighbors by 50%, while ATL03  
 312 segments are 20 m long and are disjoint. ATL06 segments are defined as including PE from pairs  
 313 of adjacent ATL03 segments, and are numbered to match the second of the two, so that ATL06

Figure 3-4. Example PE selection



Selecting PEs for a reference point. Top: GT locations for eight simulated repeat measurement of track 188 (colored lines). Black lines are plotted every 2 km in the along-track coordinate  $x$ . Bottom: selected footprint locations for a reference point on PT 3 (circles, every 10<sup>th</sup> shown). Lines and circles are color coded by repeat. Solid points show reference-point locations, dashed lines show the 40-m along-track extent of the segments, filled circles show segment centers. Background image from (Scambos and others, 2007)

314 segment  $m$  includes ATL03 segments  $m$  and  $m-1$ .

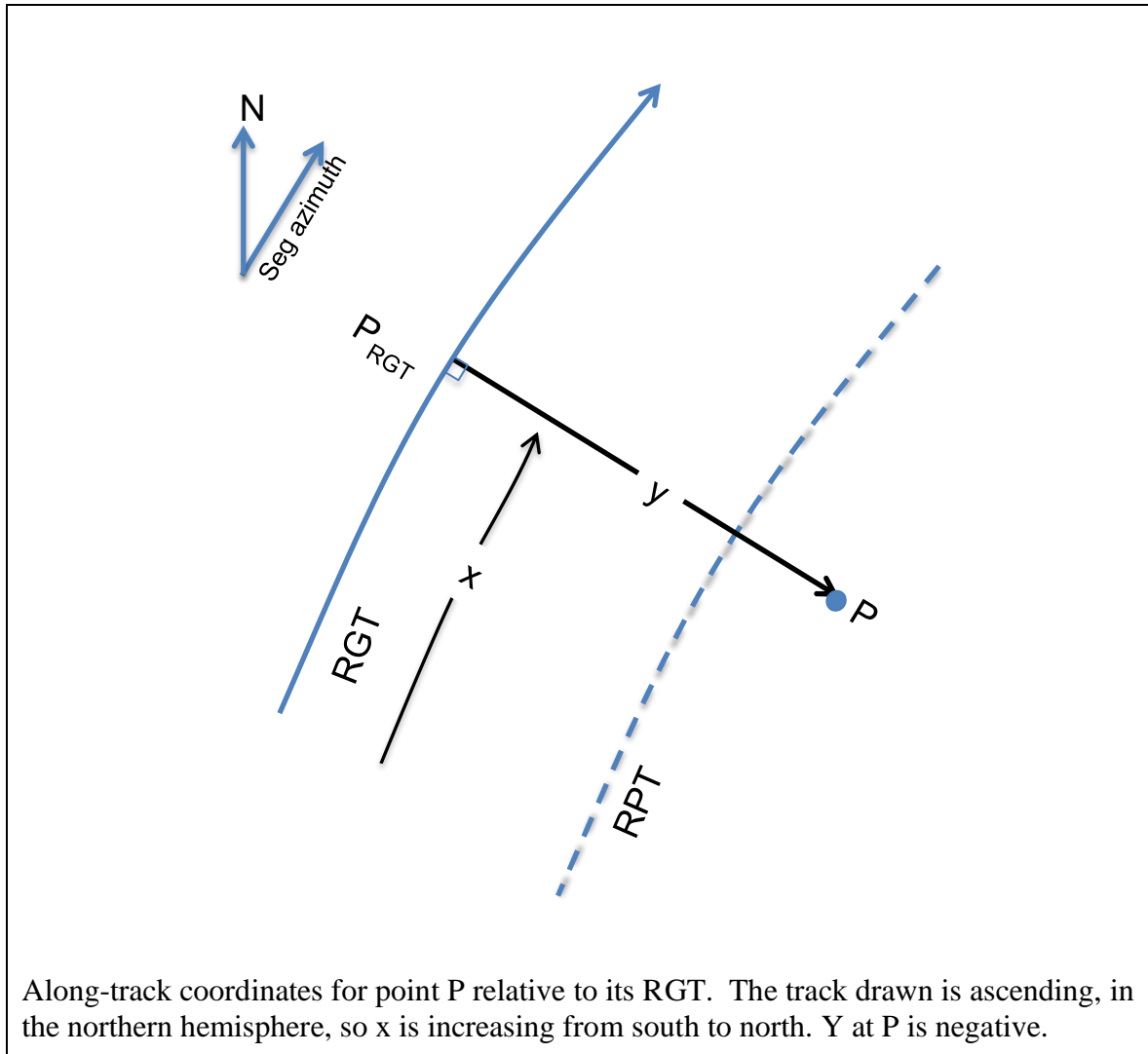
### 3.3.2 Local Coordinate Systems

To select the PEs associated with each reference point, the height data are grouped in local coordinates. The local coordinate system is defined in the ATL03G ATBD. Briefly, the coordinate system is defined separately for each RGT with an  $x$  coordinate that follows the RGT, starting at its equator crossing going north. The  $y$  coordinate is measured perpendicular to the  $x$  coordinate and is positive to the left. Thus, the  $x$  coordinate runs from zero to around forty thousand km for each track, the  $y$  coordinate runs from approximately -3.3 km for the right beam pair to approximately 3.3 km for the left beam pair, although its values may be larger if ATLAS is pointed off nadir.

To calculate along-track coordinates for any point  $P$  adjacent to an RGT, we define the  $x$  coordinate to be equal to the  $x$  coordinate of the nearest point on the RGT,  $P_{RGT}$ . The  $y$  coordinate is equal the distance between  $P$  and  $P_{RGT}$ , measured to the left of the along-track direction (Figure 3-5). This calculation is carried out for each PE in ATL03: The  $x$  coordinate for each PE is equal to the sum of the ATL03 parameters `/geolocation/segment_dist_x` and `/heights/dist_ph_along`. The  $y$  coordinate is equal to the ATL03 `dist_ph_across` parameter. Our reference points are defined to be equal to the start of the first ATL03 segment, so that ATL06 segment  $m$  encompasses all PE from ATL03 segments  $m-1$  and  $m$ .

Figure 3-5. RGT coordinates

---



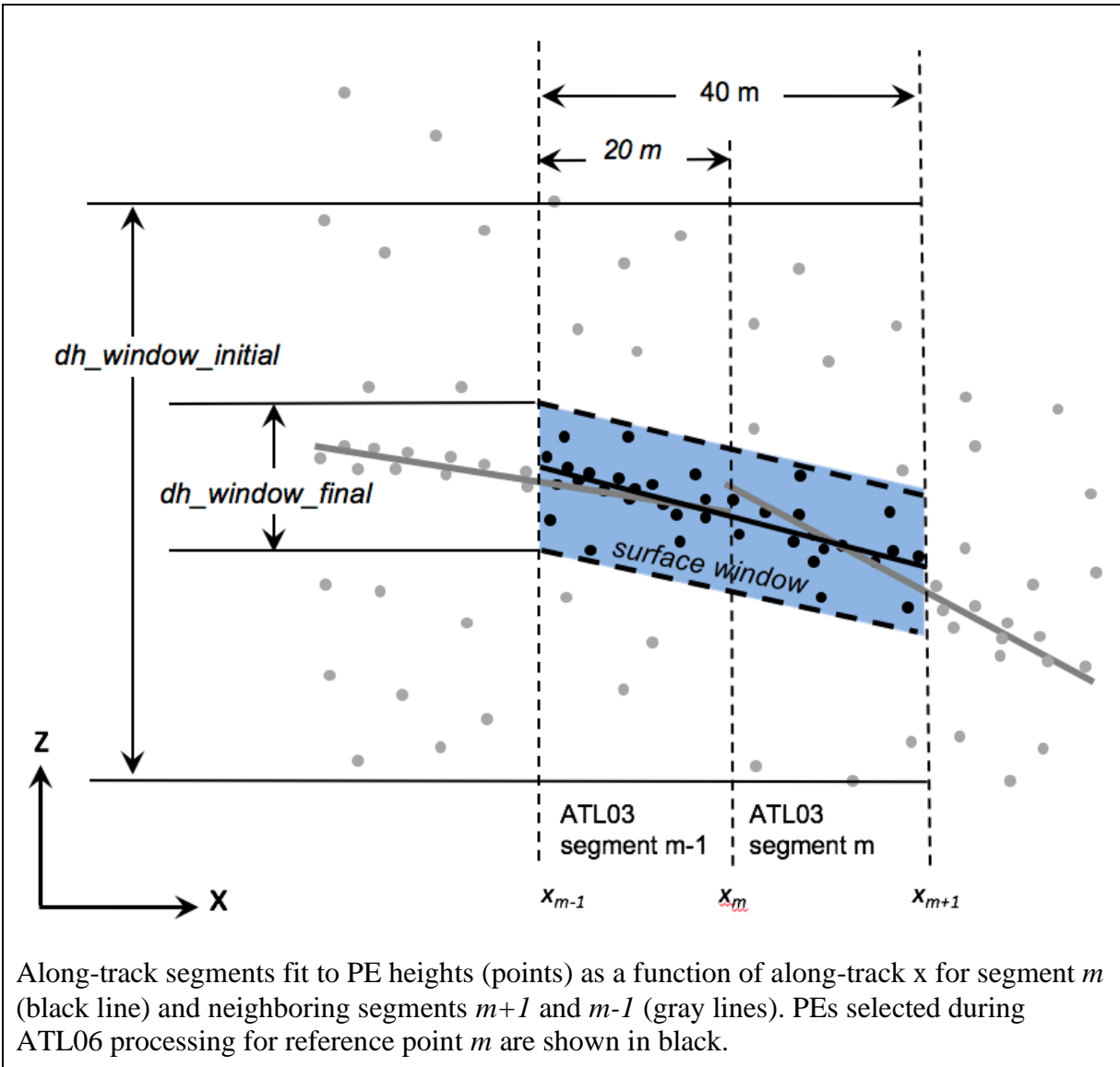
333

334 The AL06 along-track coordinate for each segment is given by the parameter  $x_{atc}$ . The across-  
 335 track coordinate is given by  $y_{atc}$ , and the angle between the along-track vector and local north  
 336 is given in the parameter  $seg\_azimuth$ . To allow easy referencing between ATL06 and ATL03,  
 337 we provide the number for the second ATL03 segment in each ATL06 segment in the variable  
 338  $segment\_id$ .

### 339 3.3.3 Parameters describing selected PEs

340 ATL06 heights and slopes are estimated by piecewise-linear fits to PEs within each overlapping  
 341 40-m segment. Since ATL06 segments are 40-meters long and overlap by 50%, we can collect  
 342 the photons for each segment,  $m$ , by selecting all ATL03 PE that have  $segment\_id$  equal to  $m-1$   
 343 or  $m$ .

Figure 3-6 Segment fitting



344

345 The initial PE selection is shown in Figure 3-6. ATL03 data give a ground-finding confidence  
 346 flag that indicates whether each PE was detected high confidence (SNR > 100, flag value of 4),  
 347 medium ( $100 < \text{SNR} < 40$ , flag value of 3) low confidence (SNR < 40, yet still passes threshold  
 348 test, flag value of 2), or is included because it falls within 10m of the detected surface (flag value  
 349 of 1).

350 An initial surface window is valid if it contains at least 10 PE, and if the along-track distance  
 351 between the first and last PE is greater than 20 m. This ensures that there are enough PE to  
 352 determine both the height and slope of the segment. We define three possible sources for signal-  
 353 selection data:

- 354 1. ATL03 confident PE (*signal\_selection\_source*=0): PE with *confidence\_flag* values > 1  
 355 (low or better confidence)

2. All ATL03 detected PE (*signal\_selection\_source*=1): PE with *confidence\_flag* flag values  $\geq 1$  (including low or better, and pad PE).
3. A backup signal-finding algorithm (*signal\_selection\_source*=2)

### 3.3.3.1 Setting the surface window based on ATL03 flagged PE.

If sources 1 or 2 define a valid surface window, we calculate the slope of that window using an initial least-squares fit to  $h$  as a function of  $x$  for the flagged PE. Based on the slope of this window, we calculate *sigma\_expected* using equation 1, and calculate the robust spread of the residuals for the flagged PE (correcting for the background PE rate), *r\_flagged*. If ATL03 confident PE define a window (case 1), the minimum surface window size,  $w_{min}$ , is set to 3 m, and if ATL03 confident PE do not define a window but the combination of ATL03 detected and pad PE do (case 2),  $w_{min}$  is set to 10 m. The initial surface window, *w\_surface\_window\_initial* is then set to  $\max(w_{min}, 6 \sigma_{expected}, 6 r_{flagged})$ . The residuals for all of the segment PE are then calculated, and PE with residuals within  $\pm w_{surface\_window\_initial}/2$  are selected and passed on to the iterative along-track fitting.

### 3.3.3.2 Setting the surface window using the backup signal-finding algorithm

If any ATL03 PE are detected but they do not define a window or if no ATL03 PE are present, a backup algorithm is used. First, if any ATL03-flagged PE are present, the along-track slope of the initial window is set to zero, its width is set to 10 m, and it is centered vertically on the mean height of the flagged PE. If the PE within this window fail the along-track-spread test or the ten-PE test, then PE within 40 m along track of the reference point are examined to find the 10-meter-high by 80-meter-long window, centered on the reference point, containing the largest number of PE. Typically, there will be a range of center heights whose PE counts are not significantly different from the maximum; if the maximum count is  $C_{max}$ , then any window with a count greater than  $C_{max} - C_{max}^{1/2}$  will be included. The initial window will extend from 5 m below the minimum of these centers to 5 m above the top of these centers, and its length is set to 40 m. If this best window does not contain a good distribution of PE (i.e. more than 10 PE, with a horizontal spread greater than 20 m), the segment is considered invalid. If  $C_{max}$  is less than 16 (the number of PE that would be detected in an 80-meter long window with a signal strength of 10 PE/40 m, minus one standard deviation), no PE are selected, and the signal selection is marked as invalid.

**Table 3-1 *signal\_selection\_source* values**

Value	Meaning
0	Signal selection succeeded using ATL03 confident-or-better flagged PE
1	Signal selection failed using ATL03 confident-or-better flagged PE but succeeded using all flagged ATL03 PE

2	Signal selection failed using all flagged ATL03 PE, but succeeded using the backup algorithm
3	All signal-finding strategies failed.

386  
 387 The *signal\_selection\_source* parameter describes the success or failure of each step in this  
 388 process, and Table 3-1 describes the meaning of each value. For each signal-selection algorithm  
 389 that was attempted, the *signal\_selection\_status\_confident*, *signal\_selection\_status\_all*, and  
 390 *signal\_selection\_status\_backup* parameters in the *segment\_quality* group give details of the  
 391 success or failure of each part of the algorithm. The *signal\_selection\_source* parameter is  
 392 provided for all segments (successful or not) in the *segment\_quality* group, and is provided for  
 393 segments for which at least one pair has an elevation in the *fit\_statistics* subgroup.

**Table 3-2 Status parameters for signal-selection algorithms**

<i>Signal_selection_status_confident</i>	
0	Signal selection succeeded using ATL03 low-or-better confidence PEs
1	Signal selection using ATL03 low-or-better confidence PEs failed the 20-meter-spread test
2	Signal selection using ATL03 low-or-better confidence PEs failed the 10-photon-count test
3	Signal selection using ATL03 low-or-better confidence PEs failed both tests
<i>Signal_selection_status_all</i>	
0	Signal selection succeeded using all ATL03 flagged PEs (or algorithm not attempted)
1	Signal selection using all ATL03 flagged PEs failed the 20-meter-spread test
2	Signal selection using all ATL03 flagged PEs failed the 10-photon-count test
3	Signal selection using all ATL03 flagged PEs failed both tests

<i>Signal_selection_status_backup</i>	
<b>0</b>	Signal selection succeeded using the backup signal finder after centering the window on flagged PE (or backup signal finder not attempted)
<b>1</b>	Signal selection succeeded using the backup signal finder after searching for the strongest-signal window using four adjacent ATL03 segments
<b>2</b>	Signal selection using the backup signal finder failed the 20-meter-spread test
<b>3</b>	Signal selection using the backup signal finder failed the 10-photon-count test
<b>4</b>	Signal selection using the backup signal finder failed both tests

394

395 The final, refined window is described in the *fit\_statistics* subgroups. The height of the window  
 396 is given as *dh\_window\_final*, and the number of pulses that might contribute PE to the ATL06  
 397 segment is given in the *n\_seg\_pulses* parameter. Note that not all of the pulses in the segment  
 398 necessarily contribute to the received PEs if the signal strength is low. We calculate  
 399 *n\_seg\_pulses* based on the speed of the nadir point,  $v_{nadir}$ , of the spacecraft along the ground  
 400 track, the pulse repetition frequency, and the nominal 40-m length of the ATL06 segment:  
 401  $N_{seg\_pulses} = PRF \times 40 \text{ m} / v_{nadir}$ . This parameter has non-integer values, because it is intended  
 402 to represent the expected number of pulses in each segment. There is no straightforward way to  
 403 determine exactly which pulses might have targeted a particular ground segment.

### 404 3.3.4 Handling of invalid segments

405 Segments must pass a series of tests before their elevations are reported in the ATL06  
 406 *gtxx/land\_ice\_segments* groups. The signal selection routines must return at least 10 PE, spread  
 407 over at least 20 m. Fitting does not proceed if these criteria are not met. For segments that  
 408 continue to the surface window refinement routine, after the surface window refinement is  
 409 complete, the final PE count and surface-window height are checked against the *snr\_significance*  
 410 parameter, to ensure that the probability of the measured signal-to-noise ration resulting from a  
 411 random signal selection is small. Only segments with *snr\_significance*  $< 0.05$  (indicating that,  
 412 given a random-noise input, the algorithm would converge to the calculated SNR less than 5% of  
 413 the time) proceed to the next stage.

414 These criteria allow a significant number of low-quality segment heights to be reported in  
 415 ATL06. This intended for the benefit of users who need to measure surface heights under  
 416 marginal conditions. To help other users remove these segments, the

*land\_ice\_segments/ATL06\_quality\_summary* parameter gives a synopsis of the parameters relevant to segment quality (Table 4-3), any one of which could indicate unusable data. The subset of segments with *ATL06\_quality\_summary* = 0 are unlikely to contain blunders due to signal-finding errors. This choice of parameters may reject useful elevations collected over rough, strongly sloping, or low-reflectivity surfaces and under clouds so obtain more height estimates, users may need to examine additional parameters in ATL06, or regenerate a similar flag for themselves based on a less-stringent set of parameters.

A variety of data flags are available to indicate why a particular segment does not have a reported height parameter. In many cases, the strong-beam segment in a pair will have a reported height, and the weak beam will not; in these cases, a full record is available for the weak-beam segment, providing all parameters up to the step where the fitting process failed. In cases where neither the strong nor the weak beam returned a surface height, the *segment\_quality* group provides the *signal\_selection\_source* parameter, which will show a value of 3 if all signal-selection strategies failed. Only in cases where both segments passed the signal-selection tests but did not pass the *snr\_significance* < 0.05 test will there be an entry in *segment\_quality* and no entry in the remainder of the ATL06 records.

Users wishing to apply more- or less-stringent criteria to the data than those described above can examine the refined surface window width *fit\_statistics/w\_surface\_window\_final*, the signal-to-noise ratio, *fit\_statistics/snr*, the range-based-error parameter, *land\_ice\_segments/h\_li\_sigma* and the uncorrected reflectance, *r\_eff*, to ensure that they are within expected ranges.

### 3.3.5 Surface-window refinement and least-squares height estimate

The ATL06 ground-finding algorithm refines the ATL03 surface detection estimate by iterative fitting of the initially-selected ATL03 PEs with the along-track segment model, rejecting PEs with large residuals to the model at each step (3.3.5.2). After the iterations are terminated, the final model height, based on this fit, *h\_mean*, is used as an input to the next stage of the algorithm, in which the model residuals are used to derive corrections to the model height.

#### 3.3.5.1 Least-squares fitting

For each segment, we first calculate a least-squares best-fitting segment to the initially selected ATL03 PEs, then use an iterative procedure based on the least-squares fit to refine this window. Each time we perform the least-squares fit, we construct a design matrix,  $\mathbf{G}_0$ , from the vector  $\mathbf{x}$ , of along-track coordinates for the selected PEs:

$$\mathbf{G}_0 = [1 \ \mathbf{x}]$$

2

The segment height and along-track slope are calculated based on  $\mathbf{G}_0$  and the vector of ATL03 heights,  $\mathbf{h}$ , as:



$$[h_{fit}, \frac{dh}{dx}] = (\mathbf{G}_0^T \mathbf{G}_0)^{-1} \mathbf{G}_0^T \mathbf{h} \quad 3$$

451 The residuals to this model are then calculated:

$$r_o = h - \mathbf{G}_0 [h_{fit}, \frac{dh}{dx}] \quad 4$$

452

### 453 3.3.5.2 Iterative ground-window refinement

454 The initial surface window height may be as large as 20 meters from top to bottom, larger in  
 455 rough terrain or when the signal-to-noise ratio is small. This means that it may include many  
 456 noise PEs mixed with the signal PEs. If included in the calculation, these will lead to large  
 457 random errors in the surface slope and height. We can increase the proportion of signal PEs by  
 458 shrinking the surface window, but need to avoid shrinking it so much that we lose signal PEs.  
 459 To do this, we seek to find a window centered on the median height of the surface-return PEs,  
 460 whose height is three times the spread of the surface PE height residuals. Because the spread and  
 461 the median of the surface PEs are not initially known, we use an iterative procedure to shrink the  
 462 size of the surface window, estimating the median and spread at each step.

463 We have two ways of calculating a value for the spread of the surface return, which we combine  
 464 as part of our calculation of the width of the surface window. The first is to predict the RMS  
 465 spread of the surface return using an initial estimate of the surface-slope vector and Equation 1 to  
 466 give *h\_expected\_RMS*, assuming zero roughness. The second is to calculate it based on the  
 467 spread of the residuals to the current model,  $\sigma_o$ . In low-signal-to-noise conditions, we include a  
 468 correction for the background signal level in this calculation (described in 3.11). Since either of  
 469 these might provide a good estimate of the spread of the surface PEs we take the maximum of  
 470 these two values as our spread estimate. To avoid excessive trimming, we eliminate PEs only if  
 471 their residual magnitude is greater than the maximum of 1.5 m and three times our spread  
 472 estimate.

473 We initialize the iterative procedure with the PE selection described in the previous two sections.  
 474 In cases where the signal selection was initialized with flagged PE (*signal\_selection\_source=0*  
 475 *or 1*), the iterative ground-window refinement is forced to use only PE included in the initial  
 476 selection. In all other cases, iterations after the first may include PE that were not included in the  
 477 initial selection, so the window may expand or migrate as iterations progress. In either case the  
 478 PE that might be selected are the *selectable* PE.

479 At each step, we

- 480 a) Perform a least-squares fit to the currently selected PEs using equation 3, giving a current  
 481 model estimate,  $[h_{mean}, dh/dx]$  and residuals to the model,  $r$ .
- 482 b) Calculate the median and background-corrected RDE (see 3.11) of the distribution of the  
 483 residuals for the selected PEs,  $r_{med}$  and  $\sigma_o$ , and update *h\_expected\_RMS* based on the  
 484 current  $dh/dx$  estimate. The residual spread ( $\sigma_o$ ) is limited to a maximum value of 5 m.
- 485 c) Calculate the residuals of all of the *selectable* PEs to the current model estimate,  $r$ .

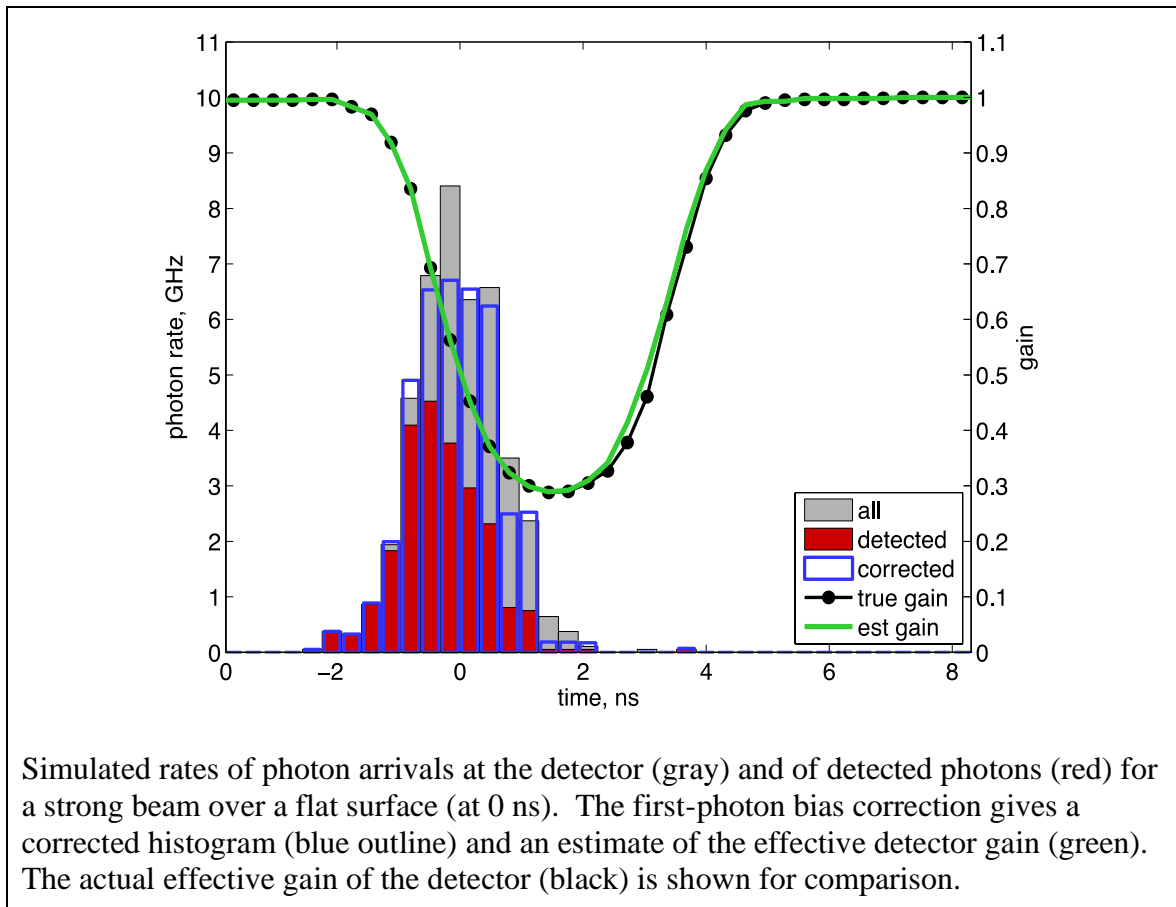
- d) Select PEs from among the *selectable* PEs for which  $|r - r_{med}| < H_{window}/2$ , where  $H_{window} = \max(6 \sigma_o, 6 h_{expected\_RMS}, 0.75 H_{window\_last}, 3 \text{ m})$ .

The iterations are terminated if no further PEs are eliminated in a given step. If a given iteration eliminates PE such that the selected PE no longer define a window, then that step is reversed, and the iterations are terminated. The inclusion of  $0.75 H_{window\_last}$  as the minimum size of the window in each step of the calculation attempts to ensure that the calculation does not converge too fast to a spurious value of  $h_{mean}$ .

The window width after the final step is reported as  $w_{surface\_window\_final}$ , and the number of PEs in the window is reported as  $n_{fit\_photons}$ . The final slope of the along-track segment is reported as  $dh_{fit\_dx}$ . The median residual to the along-track fit is given in the parameter  $med\_r_{fit}$ , and is used to convert between a mean-based height estimate for each segment and a median-based estimate.

### 3.4 First-Photon Bias

Figure 3-7. First-photon bias correction



The first-photon bias (FPB) results from an inherent problem with the photon-counting detectors selected for ATLAS. For a short time,  $t_{dead}$ , after an individual pixel of each detector detects a photon, it cannot detect another. This means that photons early in a ground return are more likely to be detected than those later on, and, for a symmetric return-photon distribution, the mean surface height estimate is biased upwards, an effect that is largest for more intense pulses and for pulses from flat surfaces where the return energy is concentrated in a short period of time. Note that for ATLAS's asymmetric transmit pulse, the first-photon bias may result in either positive or negative height errors, because for small roughness values, the FPB suppresses detection the early, intense part of the waveform, while the tail of the waveform is unaffected, resulting in a negative height bias. For larger roughness values, FPB affects the tail and the peak more equally, and the bias becomes positive. For clarity, we will describe modeling results using a simulated symmetric Gaussian transmit pulse, but the corrections provided on the ATL06 products may have either positive or negative signs.

For ATLAS,  $t_{dead}$  is quite short, at approximately 3.2 ns, and there are multiple pixels in each detector (16 for the strong beams, 4 for the weak), to which photons are assigned at random as they reach the detector, resulting in fewer photons reaching each pixel while it is inactive. Despite this, up to several cm of bias may be observed for flat bright surfaces. Figure 3-7 shows simulated instantaneous photon rates for photons incident on the detector, and of detected photons for returns from a flat, smooth surface for a strong spot, under moderately saturated conditions (1.2 photons per pixel per pulse), aggregated over 40 m. Background PE are not included in the simulation, but their effect is likely to be minor, because their contribution to the total PE count is, in strong-signal conditions, a small fraction of the total, and the correction is negligible if the signal is not strong.

We have found that we can generate a correction for the first-photon bias based on a model of the detector for PEs aggregated over a 40-m ground-track segment. In this algorithm, we generate a histogram representing the distribution of heights around the ground return for the segment, as represented by the histogram of PE residuals to the best-fitting sloping segment model. We then estimate the effective gain of the detector, a function that represents the probability that a photon would have been detected if it reached the detector. We use this function to correct the received histogram to an estimate of the histogram of all the photons, detected and undetected. Statistics of this histogram are used to improve estimates of the surface height.

Using the residuals to the best-fitting segment in this calculation assumes that each pulse experiences the same distribution of photon-arrival times, shifted in time by the along-track surface slope, so that a typical distribution can be found by correcting for the along-track slope. If the surface slope or the reflectance has strong variations within a segment this assumption will fail, but for segments where the correction is large (i.e., in the interior of the ice sheets), it should not introduce large errors because ice-sheet surfaces are typically very homogeneous.

### 3.4.1 Mathematical Description for the First-Photon Bias

The photon distribution incident on the detectors is written as a function of  $t_i - t_g$ , where  $t_i$  is the PE time and  $t_{gi}$  is the time of the ground return. In practice, this is calculated as  $t_i - t_{gi} = -r c/2$ ,

542 where  $r$  is the height residual to the best-fitting segment. We can express the histogram over  $N$   
543 PE times as:

$$N(t; t_i - t_{gi}) = \sum_{i=1:N} \sum_{t_i - t_{gi} \in (t, t + \Delta t]} 1 \quad 5$$

544 Only some of these photons are detected: After a photon hits a detector, that detector cannot  
545 detect another photon until it becomes active, after receiving no photons for a time  $t_{dead}$ . This can  
546 be expressed by a function giving the status of each pixel for each pulse at time  $t$ :

$$A(t, p, pixel) = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if pixel is active at time } t \text{ for pulse } p \\ 0 & \text{if pixel is inactive at time } t \text{ for pulse } p \end{cases} \quad 6$$

547 The detected photon distribution is then:

$$N_d(t; t - t_g) = \sum_{i=1:N} \sum_{t_i - t_{gi} \in (t, t + \Delta t]} A(t_i - t_{gi}, pixel_i, P_i) \quad 7$$

548 If the photon distribution in  $t - t_g$  is constant over the pulses and over all pixels, then we can write:

$$N_d(t - t_g; \Delta t) = G(t - t_g) N(t - t_g; \Delta t) \quad 8$$

549 Where:

$$G(t - t_g) = \frac{1}{N_{pulses} N_{pixels}} \sum_{pulses, pixels} A(t - t_g) \quad 9$$

550 This function is effectively a gain for this collection of pulses. It ranges between zero, when all  
551 pixels are inactive, and one, when all pixels are active. The detector gain is shown by the black  
552 line in Figure 3-7. It falls rapidly from unity to about 0.3 during the early part of the surface  
553 return, then recovers gradually over a period slightly longer than  $t_{dead}$ , about 3.2 ns.

### 554 3.4.2 Correction Formulation for the First-Photon Bias

555 We implement the gain correction based on channel dead-time estimates from ATL03 and a  
556 histogram of residual times relative to the best-fitting segment model from 3.3.5.2, truncated by  
557  $\pm h\_window\_final/2$ . We represent the deadtime for the detector with the mean deadtime for all  
558 channels in the detector, and assume that all pixels (and channels) have identical sensitivity.  
559 Although the algorithm's function does not depend strongly on the spacing of the histogram bins,  
560 our test software has used a bin spacing of 0.05 ns. We express the timing for the correction as a  
561 function of time relative to the ground-return time, under the assumption that for an entire  
562 segment, the return shape will be consistent relative to the ground-return time:

$$\tau = t - t_g \quad 10$$

Our strategy in this calculation is to correct an initial histogram of PE arrivals for the effects of detector dead time ( $G < 1$ ) by dividing  $N_d(\tau)$  by  $G(\tau)$ :

$$N_{est}(\tau; \Delta t) = \frac{1}{G(\tau)} N_d(\tau, \Delta t) \quad 11$$

To correct waveforms for the effects of dead time, we can use an *a posteriori* estimate of  $G(\tau)$  calculated with a simple model of the detector. In this model, we calculate a detected distribution,  $N_d$ , as the histogram of PE arrivals relative to the ground bin for a single-segment (40 m) section of track. For each bin in the histogram, we then determine the average number of pixels in the detector that were inactive. This is calculated:

$$P_{dead}(\tau) = \frac{\text{number of photons in } [\tau - t_{dead}, \tau)}{N_{pix} N_{pulses}} \quad 12$$

The estimated gain is then  $1 - P_{dead}$ . This calculation can be carried out efficiently by convolving the histogram of residuals with a rectangular window of height  $1/N_{pix}N_{pulses}$ , and shifting the result by the width of the window.

For our simulated example (in Figure 3-7) the recovered gain (green) is approximately equal to the true detector gain; this example is fairly typical of other simulations of this process, where the estimated gain is usually within a few percent of the true gain. There are visible differences between the corrected photon-timing histogram (blue) and the incident photon histogram, but the effects of these variations on the recovered heights are relatively small and have approximately zero bias.

### 3.4.3 Statistics Derived from the First-Photon-Bias Correction

The output of the gain estimation is a corrected histogram of height differences relative to a reference surface. Statistics of this histogram (e.g. its vertical centroid, its median) can be calculated as they would for the uncorrected PE heights. Since these statistics are calculated on the histogram of uncorrected photon residuals, their values give the correction relative to the mean of the PE heights. Thus, to calculate the corrected mean or median surface height, we add the gain-corrected mean or median of the residuals, respectively, to the uncorrected mean height. Because we expect the transmitted pulse to be skewed, we expect the median height correction to be much larger than the mean height correction.

#### 3.4.3.1 Mean Height Correction

The mean height correction based on the corrected histogram is:

$$fpb\_mean\_corr = \sum \frac{N_{corr,i}}{N_{tot}} dz_i \quad 13$$

592 Here  $dz_i$  are the bin centers of the histogram of the PE residuals (i.e. the difference between the  
 593 PE heights and the linear segment fit. The error in the mean correction is found using the error  
 594 propagation formula for a centroid, assuming that the measured PE counts are Poisson  
 595 distributed and ignoring the error in the gain estimate. For each bin in the corrected histogram,  
 596 the corrected count at that bin has an error:

$$\sigma_{N,corr,i} = \frac{N_{0,i}^{1/2}}{G_i} \quad 14$$

597 The error in the mean height based on the corrected counts is then:

$$\sigma_{f_{pb-corr}} = \left[ \sum \left( \sigma_{N,corr,i} \frac{dz_i - f_{pb-corr}}{N_{corr,tot}} \right)^2 \right]^{1/2} \quad 15$$

### 598 **3.4.3.2 Median Height Correction**

599 The median correction and its error are calculated from the CDF (Cumulative Distribution  
 600 Function) of the corrected histogram as a function of  $dz$ :

$$CDF(dz_0) = \sum_{dz_i < dz_0} \frac{N_{corr,i}}{N_{corr,tot}} \quad 16$$

601 The median of the corrected histogram is found by interpolating into  $dz$  as a function of  $CDF(dz)$   
 602 at an abscissa value of 0.5:

$$median_{f_{pb}} = CDF^{-1}(0.5) \quad 17$$

603 Because CDF is a function of the residuals to the linear segment-fit model, the median calculated  
 604 in this way gives an offset relative to  $h_{mean}$ .

605 The uncertainty of the median interpolated from the CDF is the slope of the inverse function of  
 606  $CDF(dz)$  with respect to CDF times the statistical uncertainty in the CDF at the median point:

$$\sigma_{med} = \left. \frac{dz}{dCDF} \right|_{CDF=0.5} \sigma_{CDF}(h_{med}) \quad 18$$

607 The statistical uncertainty in the CDF achieves half its total variance at the median, so we can  
 608 calculate its uncertainty at the median as:

$$\sigma_{cdf}(dz_{med}) = \left[ \frac{1}{2} \sum \frac{\sigma_{N,corr,i}^2}{N_{tot,corr}^2} \right]^{1/2} \quad 19$$

609 We estimate the slope of the CDF based on the 60<sup>th</sup> and 40<sup>th</sup> percentiles of  $dz$ , calculated from  
 610 the CDF of  $dz$ , and noting that 20% of the residuals should fall within this range. The error in  
 611 the median correction is then:

$$fpb\_md\_corr\_sigma = \frac{dz_{60} - dz_{40}}{0.2} \sigma_{cdf}(dz_{med}) \quad 20$$

612 For both the mean and the median corrections, the error calculated in this way gives the total  
 613 error in the surface height due to the Poisson sampling in the data. It does not take into account  
 614 the effects of the along-track distribution of the photons, as the propagated least-squares error  
 615 (equation 19) does, so the error in the final, corrected height measurement ( $h\_li\_sigma$ ) is the  
 616 maximum of  $sigma\_h\_mean$  and  $fpb\_med\_corr\_sigma$ . Note that neither the combined error nor  
 617 the median error calculated above are rigorous estimates of the error guaranteed to work under  
 618 all circumstances. However, numerical experiments have shown that these error estimates match  
 619 the RMS spread of recovered values to within ~10% for numbers of PEs greater than ~20. For  
 620 smaller numbers of PE, the error estimates may be up to 20% too small.

#### 621 3.4.3.3 Corrected Return Count

622 The corrected number of returned photons is calculated:

$$fpb_{N\_photons} = \sum N_{corr} \quad 21$$

623 This sum is carried out over the ground window calculated during ground-bin refinement  
 624 (3.3.5.2). This is similar to the dead-time correction on ATL03.

#### 625 3.4.3.4 Correction Validity

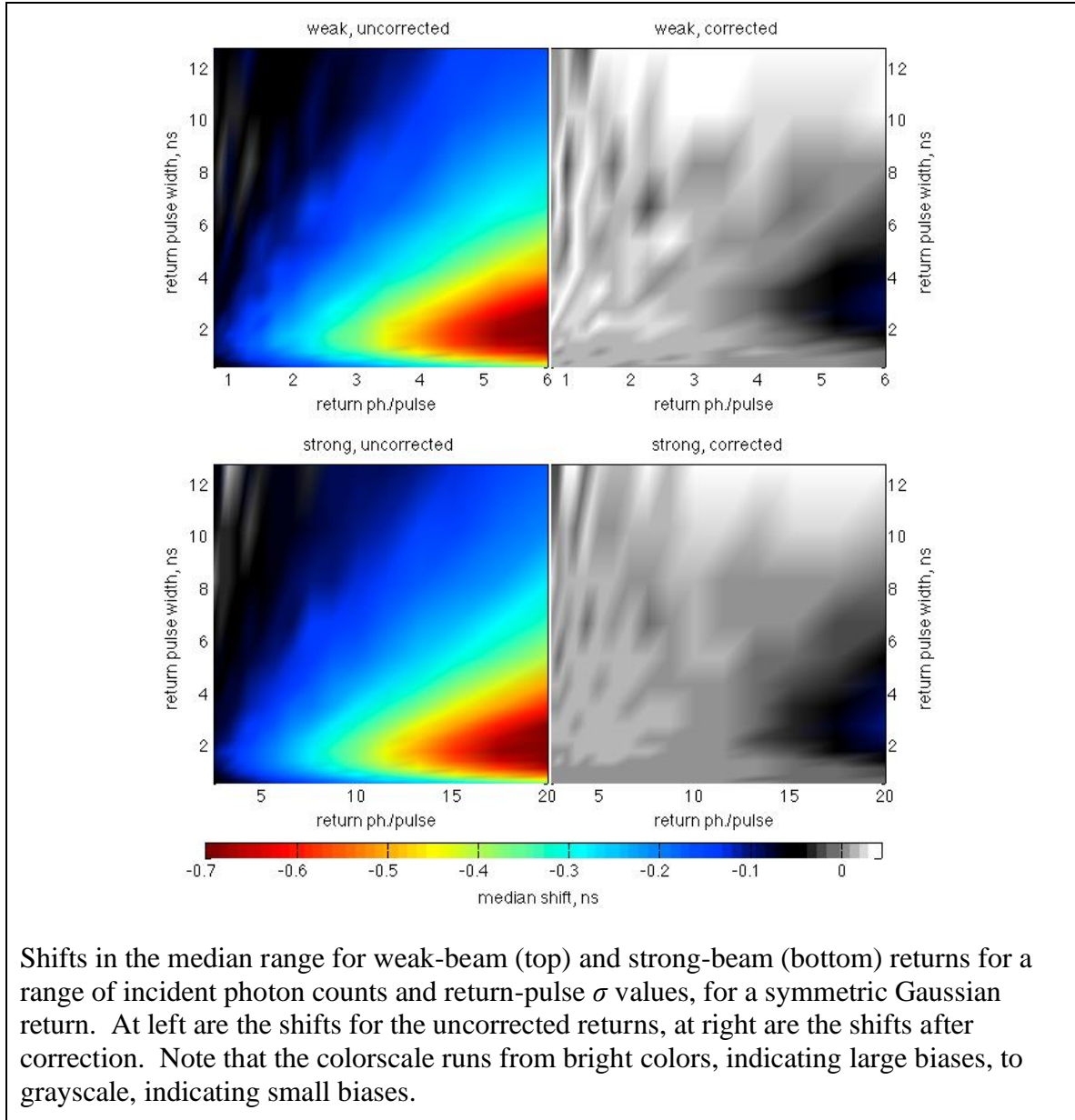
626 The correction should provide accurate height and signal-strength corrections as long as there are  
 627 at least a few active detector pixels during each time increment. If the estimated detector gain for  
 628 a segment falls below  $2/(N\_seg\_pulses \times n\_pixels)$ , the correction values are set to their invalid  
 629 value ( $NaN$ ), so that any value that uses these corrections (e.g.  $h\_li$ ,  $fpb\_n\_corr$ ) will also be  
 630 marked invalid.

631

#### 632 3.4.3.5 Accuracy of the first-photon bias correction

Figure 3-8. Accuracy of first-photon bias correction elevation recovery

---

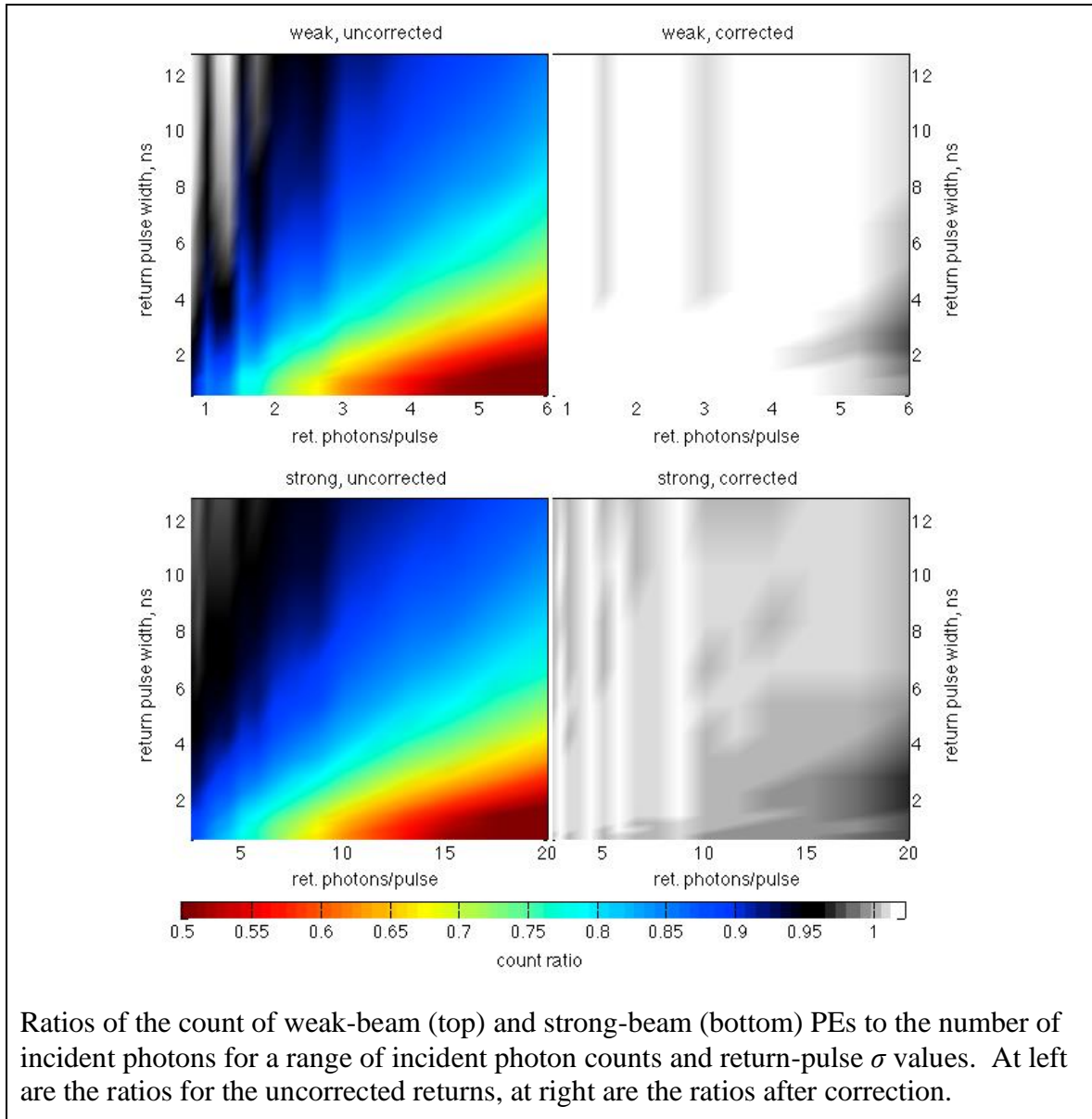


Shifts in the median range for weak-beam (top) and strong-beam (bottom) returns for a range of incident photon counts and return-pulse  $\sigma$  values, for a symmetric Gaussian return. At left are the shifts for the uncorrected returns, at right are the shifts after correction. Note that the colorscale runs from bright colors, indicating large biases, to grayscale, indicating small biases.

633 We assess the potential accuracy of this calculation with a simple simulation of elevation  
 634 recovery for a strong and a weak ATLAS beam. For each realization of this simulation, we  
 635 generate random arrival times for a collection of  $N_{inc}$  incident return-pulse photons, with  
 636 standard deviation  $\sigma_{inc}$ . These photons are assigned at random to detector pixels (4 pixels for a  
 637 weak beam, 16 for a strong beam) and are labeled as detected or undetected based on the detector  
 638 model described in 3.4 with a dead time of 3.2 ns. Based on these PE times, we then calculate a  
 639 corrected arrival-time histogram as described in 3.4.2 and calculate statistics for this distribution  
 640 as described in 3.4.3.

Figure 3-9. Accuracy of first-photon-bias-correction signal strength recovery





641

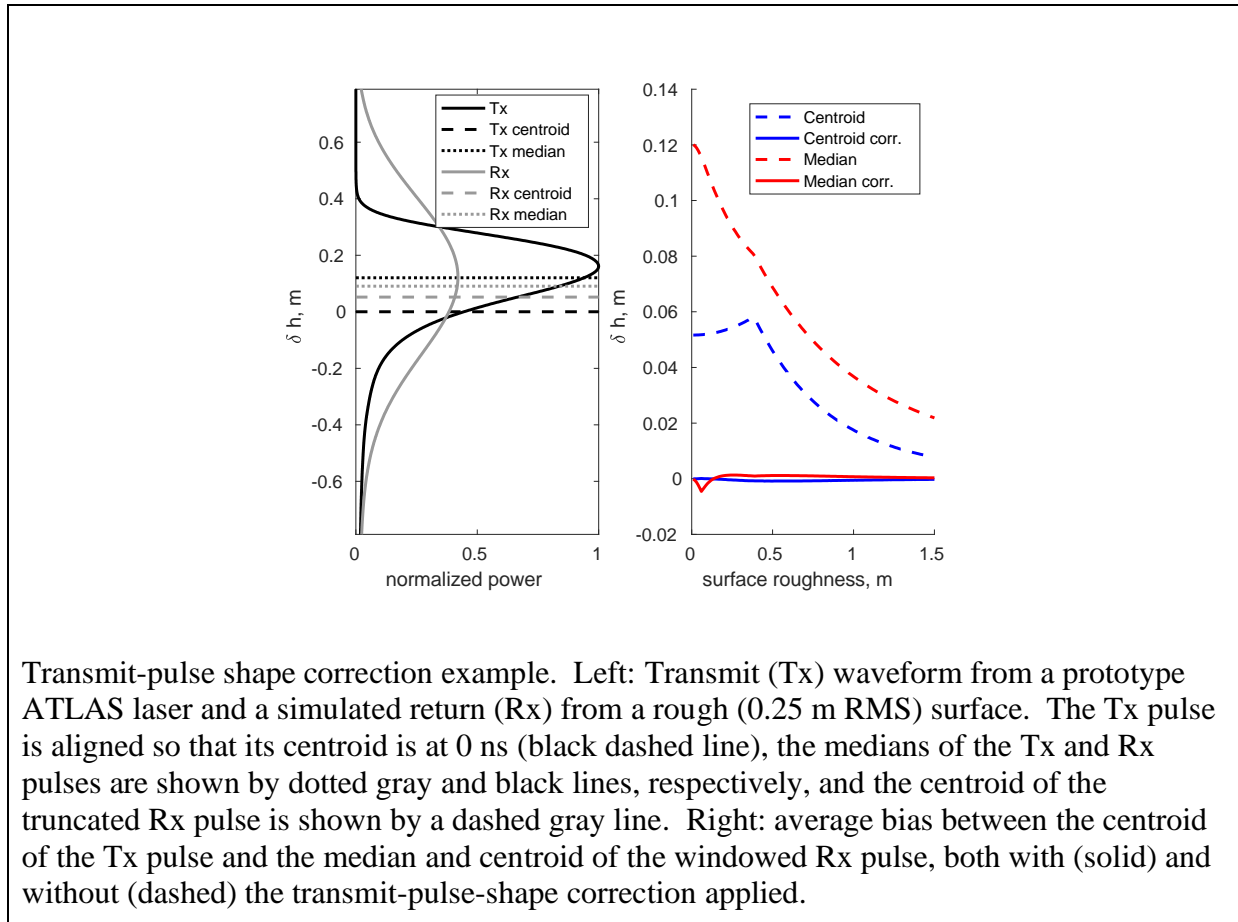
642 Results of this simulation are shown in Figure 3-8 and Figure 3-9. For the strongest simulated  
 643 returns, with around two photons per pulse per detector pixel, uncorrected time biases are as  
 644 large as -0.7 ns, corresponding to positive elevation biases of about 0.1 m. For these returns,  
 645 only about 60% incident photons are detected. For expected return strengths, of 0.8 photons per  
 646 pulse per pixel, elevation biases are smaller, around -0.2 ns, and about 85% of incident photons  
 647 are detected. The largest elevation errors come for return-pulse widths of around 2 ns, and the  
 648 largest loss of signal photons happens for the smallest pulse widths and the strongest returns.

649 Applying the correction removes the majority of the bias, both for return times and for signal  
 650 strengths. Corrected returns have much smaller time biases, accurate to 0.1 ns (1.5 cm) for the

strongest (2 photons/pixel/pulse) returns, and 0.02 ns (0.03 cm) for expected (0.8 ph/pixel/pulse) return strengths. Corrected PE counts are within 2% of the incident counts.

### 3.5 Transmit-pulse shape correction

Figure 3-10. Transmit-pulse-shape correction



654

655 The ATL06 surface-fitting routine and the ATL06 first-photon bias correction both give  
 656 estimates of the median height of the surface for each segment, relative to the centroid of the  
 657 transmit pulse, for a ‘windowed’ collection of photons of limited vertical extent (typically  $\pm 1.5$   
 658 m around the median height). However, the ATL03 PE heights are calculated relative to an  
 659 estimate of the centroid of the entire transmit pulse. Because the transmitted pulse is not  
 660 symmetric in time around its centroid, its median is different from its mean, and the centroid of  
 661 any truncated subset of the photons from this pulse will have a nonzero bias relative to those  
 662 from the full waveform. This introduces a potential bias in ATL06 height estimates.

663 The magnitude of the bias depends on three factors: the shape of the ‘tail’ of the transmitted  
 664 waveform, the width of the surface window, and the effective surface roughness (i.e. the total  
 665 broadening introduced by surface slope and roughness). The effects of the tail shape and the

surface-window height were described previously (1.1). The effect of increasing effective surface roughness is to increase the scatter in the PEs, producing returns that are closer to symmetrical, as shown for 0.25 m noise in Figure 3-10 (left panel). This larger scatter results in return-waveform medians that have smaller biases than those from a smooth surface, and in smaller biases in the truncated-waveform centroids. Figure 3-10 (right panel) shows the magnitude of biases in return centroids and medians for prototype-laser waveforms, broadened to simulate the effects surface roughness values between 0 and 1.5 meters. For each waveform, we calculated the centroid and median surface height relative to the centroid and median of the transmitted pulse, using a surface window height of a maximum of 3 m and three times the RDE of the returned PEs. The worst of the biases, for the zero-roughness median, is around 15 cm, and biases decrease with increasing roughness. The bias in the centroid is smaller than that of the median, but both are large relative to other expected instrumental biases.

We have found that we can correct for this effect by modeling expected return-pulse shapes and calculating the biases for these shapes, then subtracting the bias from the measured height estimates. The model is based on transmitted-waveform shapes measured periodically during the ICESat-2 orbit using the transmitter-echo-pulse (TEP). Using this TEP waveform and the width of the return, we estimate the extent to which reflection from the sloped, rough surface has broadened the return, and smooth the TEP waveform to broaden it to the same width. We then truncate the broadened synthetic waveform around its mean using the surface window determined in 3.3, then calculate the median and centroid of the broadened, truncated waveform. This gives corrections to the median and mean surface heights.

Note that at the time of writing of this document the relationship between the absolute values of the photon times measured in the TEP and the transmit times of the lasers has not been established. On-orbit calibration exercises and further analysis of pre-launch calibration data should be helpful in this regard, but for now, we take the TEP as a measurement of the shape of the waveform, not the timing of the transmission. Accordingly, we shift the time values on the TEP measurements obtained from ATL03 so that the centroid of the signal photons arrival times is equal to zero, and assume that this shifted TEP represents the transmit pulse.

To estimate the broadened transmit-pulse shape, we begin with an estimate of the transmitted pulse shape derived from ATL03,  $P_{tx}(t)$ , and  $RDE(t_i)$ , our estimate of the degree to which the distribution of surface returns,  $t_i$ , has been spread by its reflection from a rough or sloping surface:

$$\sigma_s^2 = \max \left( (0.01 \text{ ns})^2, RDE(t_i)^2 - RDE(P_{tx}(t))^2 \right) \quad 22$$

The  $\max((0.01 \text{ ns})^2, \dots)$  function here is included to ensure that the broadening estimate is positive. From this we generate an estimate of the surface broadening function  $S(t)$ :

$$S(t) = \exp \left( -\frac{t^2}{2\sigma_s^2} \right) \quad 23$$

The estimated broadened pulse shape,  $P_B(t)$  is the temporal convolution of  $P_{tx}(t)$  and  $S(t)$ :

$$P_B(t) = P_{tx}(t) * S(t)$$

24

701 We apply a windowing function,  $W_s(t)$ , to account for the truncation of the surface return during  
 702 the ground-bin-selection process:

$$W_s(t) = \begin{cases} 0 & |t - \text{mean}(P_B(t))| > h\_window\_final/2 \\ 1 & |t - \text{mean}(P_B(t))| \leq h\_window\_final/2 \end{cases}$$

25

703

704 The height correction for the median based on this waveform estimate is then:

$$dh_{tx} = \frac{c}{2} \text{median}_t(P_B(t)W_s(t))$$

26

705 Here  $\text{median}_t()$  represents the temporal median of a function:

$$\text{median}_t(f(t)) \equiv t \text{ such that } \int_{-\infty}^t f(t')dt' = \frac{1}{2} \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} f(t')dt'$$

27

706 The correction for the mean is identical, but uses the mean instead of the median in equation 26.  
 707 Figure 3-10 shows that after applying this correction, the remaining bias in the median and mean  
 708 heights is less than 3 mm. The value calculated in equation 26 is included in the standard  
 709 surface-height estimate,  $h_{li}$ , and is provided in the  $tx\_median\_corr$  and  $tx\_mean\_corr$  fields in  
 710 the *bias\_correction* parameter subgroup.

711

## 712 3.6 Signal, Noise, and Error Estimates

713 Before we can calculate the error in the retrieved surface height, we must form estimates of  
 714 relative contributions of signal and noise PEs to the observed PE count. Under ideal conditions,  
 715 when the signal level is high and the background count rate is low, few noise PEs will be present  
 716 among those selected by editing process described above. However, under cloudy conditions  
 717 when the sun is above the horizon this will often not be true, and it is important that the error  
 718 estimates reflect the potential presence of background PEs.

### 719 3.6.1 Background PE rate

720 The background PE rate (*bckgrd* in the *geophysical* subgroup) is derived from the ATL03  
 721 parameter */bckgrd\_atlas/bckgrd\_rate*, and is derived from a 50-shot, 200Hz count of PE within  
 722 the ATLAS signal-finding window, corrected for the number of PE detected by the ATL03  
 723 ground-finding algorithm. In general, we expect this parameter to be sufficiently accurate to  
 724 allow us to predict the number of PE within 10 m of the ground to a precision of better than 10  
 725 PE/segment.

The expected background rate,  $E_{bckgrd}$ , is also predicted based the solar elevation, assuming a flat, Lambertian surface at the ground. The calculation of this parameter is described in the ATL07 ATBD, section 4.2.3.1. This parameter, when compared against the measured  $bckgrd$ , is a potential indicator of the surface reflectance and cloud properties.

### 3.6.2 Signal PE count

The total number of PEs selected in the window, as a function of the number of signal PEs, the background rate, the number of pulses in the window, and the background window height is:

$$N_{tot} = N_{sig} + N_{BG} \quad 28$$

The number of background PEs in the window has a mean value:

$$N_{BG} = 2 N_{pulses} h_{window} BGR/c \quad 29$$

Subtracting the two gives an estimate of the number of signal PE,  $N_{signal}$ . Because the number of background PE is a Poisson random variable, the calculated  $N_{signal}$  may be less than zero in weak-signal conditions. The ratio between the number of signal and noise photons is reported as  $fit\_statistics/snr$ .

To help distinguish high-quality surface returns from returns that are likely a result of signal-finding blunders, we provide the  $fit\_statistics/snr\_significance$ , which gives the probability that in the absence of any real ground signal, a segment with at least the observed SNR would be found by the ATL06 signal-selection routine, for the initial range of heights,  $h\_range\_initial$  and background rate  $bckgrd$ . If ATL03 detected photons were used in the signal selection ( $signal\_selection\_source$  of 0 or 1, or  $signal\_selection\_status\_backup$  of 0),  $h\_range\_input$  is equal to the range of photon heights. Otherwise it is set to the full range of PE heights provided from ATL03 for the segment. The values of  $snr\_significance$  are calculated from a look-up table based on 1,000,000 realizations of random noise for background-noise values,  $bckgrd\_table$ , between 1 and 10 MHz, and for initial window sizes,  $w\_table$ , between 3 and 80 meters. For each set of random-noise PE, the backup signal-selection algorithm is run to select the input PE for the iterative ground-window refinement routine (3.3.5.2), which is then run to convergence, and the final SNR is recorded. Then, for each value of  $bckgrd\_table$  and  $w\_table$ , the probability of reporting a segment with an SNR value greater than a set of values between -10 and 10, in steps of 0.1, is calculated, and the value is stored in  $F\_table$ . To find  $snr\_significance$  for each segment, we interpolate into  $F\_table$  as a three-dimensional linear function of  $h\_range\_input$ ,  $bckgrd$ , and  $snr$  for that segment.

### 3.6.3 Per-Photon Errors

Noise PEs are vertically distributed throughout the window with a standard deviation of approximately

$$\sigma_{BG} = 0.287 h_{window} \quad 30$$

where the factor 0.287 equals the standard deviation of a uniform random variable on a unit interval.

The signal PEs have an approximate skewed Gaussian distribution, whose width depends on the transmit-pulse duration, the surface roughness, the surface slope, and the footprint width, as described in equation 1, with additional broadening possible due to atmospheric or subsurface scattering. For ice-sheet surfaces and near-vertical beams we assume that the angle between the beam and the surface slope is equal to the magnitude of the surface slope. The total standard deviation of the surface return heights,  $\sigma_{\text{photon,est}}$  is then:

$$\sigma_{\text{photon,est}} = \left( \frac{N_{BG}\sigma_{BG}^2 + N_{\text{signal}}\sigma_{\text{signal}}^2}{N_{BG} + N_{\text{signal}}} \right)^{1/2} \quad 31$$

With the exception of the surface roughness, all of the quantities needed for this equation are estimated from the data: the slope spreading is estimated from the along-track component of the surface slope and the transmitted pulse width using equation 1, and the background and signal PE counts are estimated from the total number of PEs and the background rate. If we assume the roughness to be zero, and neglect atmospheric and subsurface scattering errors, equation 31 gives a minimum error estimate. An alternate estimate of the per-PE error is the vertical spread of PEs relative to the along-track fit,  $h_{\text{rms\_misfit}}$ . We combine these two estimates by setting our error estimate,  $\sigma_{\text{photon}}$ , to the maximum of  $h_{\text{rms\_misfit}}$  and  $\sigma_{\text{photon,est}}$ .

### 3.6.4 Propagated Height Errors:

Given the established per-PE error,  $\sigma_{\text{photon}}$ , the error propagation for the linear fitting equation gives an estimate of the covariance matrix for the fit (Menke, 1989):

$$\mathbf{C}_{\text{fit}} = ((\mathbf{G}^T \mathbf{G})^{-1} \mathbf{G}^T)((\mathbf{G}^T \mathbf{G})^{-1} \mathbf{G}^T)^T \sigma_{\text{photon}}^2 \quad 32$$

The height error estimate,  $\sigma_{h\_mean}$  is the square root of the upper-left element of  $\mathbf{C}_{\text{fit}}$ . This error is combined with the sampling error estimated during the first-photon-bias calculation to give the total surface ranging error,  $h_{\text{li\_sigma}}$ . The error in the along-track slope  $\sigma_{dh\_fit\_dx}$ , is equal to the square root of the lower-right element of  $\mathbf{C}_{\text{fit}}$ .

### 3.6.5 Uncorrected reflectance

The uncorrected reflectance gives the ratio of the measured return energy to the energy expected from a white surface, through a nominal clear atmosphere (Yang and others, 2013). Following the strategy outlined in the ATL09 ATBD, we calculate:

$$r_{\text{eff}} = \frac{\pi E_{RX} r^2 F}{N_{\text{seg\_pulses}} E_{TX} A T_{\text{opt}}} \quad 33$$

Here  $E_{RX}$  is the received energy,  $r$  is the range to the surface,  $A$  is the telescope area, and  $T_{\text{opt}}$  is a factor that combines the optical efficiency of the instrument optics and the detector sensitivity.  $F$  is a calibration factor that will be determined and maintained as part of the atmospheric science

788 operations.  $E_{TX}$  is the transmitted energy per pulse from the ATL03 parameter  $tx\_pulse\_e$ . We  
 789 calculate  $E_{RX}$  based on the number of returned PE as:

$$E_{RX} = (fpb_N - N_{BG}) \frac{hc}{\lambda} \quad 34$$

790 Here  $fpb_N$  is the dead-time-corrected segment signal photon count,  $N_{BG}$  is the background-photon  
 791 count (from equation 29), and  $hc/\lambda$  is the energy received per photon. Note that this is the same  
 792 calculation as equation 4.7 in the ATL09 ATBD, except that we use the ATL06 first-photon-  
 793 bias-corrected photon count, instead of the correction factor used in ATL09. For an atmospheric  
 794 transmittance 0.95, we expect to see  $r_{eff}$  of about 0.88 over unit-reflectance surfaces.

### 795 3.7 Across-track slope calculation

796 After the iterative editing process is complete, the across-track slope is computed for the pair  
 797 based on the first-photon-bias-corrected median heights for the two segments:

$$\frac{dh}{dy} = \frac{h_{LI,R} - h_{LI,L}}{y_{ATC,R} - y_{ATC,L}} \quad 35$$

798 If only one beam has returned a height, then *across\_track\_slope* is set to *invalid* for both beams.

### 799 3.8 Subsurface-Scattering Bias

800 The subsurface-scattering, or volume-scattering, bias comes from photons that experience  
 801 multiple scattering within the snow or ice before returning to the satellite. Ice absorbs green  
 802 light only weakly, with attenuation lengths of tens of meters or more, but ice grains in firn and  
 803 air bubbles in ice both scatter green light strongly (Warren and others, 2006). While most  
 804 photons from an ATLAS pulse are expected to exit the surface of a firn pack within a fraction of  
 805 a nanosecond, others will likely be delayed significantly, producing a long tail on the histogram  
 806 of return times. Averaging return times of PEs from this tail with PEs from the surface return  
 807 leads to a delay in the mean PE return time, and a downward bias in the apparent surface height.  
 808 The median surface height is modestly less sensitive than the mean, because it is less sensitive to  
 809 outlying data values far from the central peak of the return distribution. This error and its  
 810 temporal variability is expected to be small for fine-grained snow surfaces such as those found  
 811 on the Antarctic Plateau and in central Greenland, but it may be more significant in coastal areas  
 812 where seasonal snow melt leads to large temporal variations in the surface grain size.

813 The magnitude of the subsurface-scattering bias delay depends in part on the scattering density  
 814 of the snow and its bulk absorbance, both of which are determined by the density and grain or  
 815 bubble size close to the surface, and on the impurity content of the snow or ice. Since none of  
 816 these properties may be known at the time of ATLAS processing, each must be determined  
 817 independently using external information about the snow, such as meteorological model output  
 818 or infrared reflectance data.

819 We do not expect to be able to offer an accurate correction for this effect with our current  
 820 understanding of the process. This remains an area of active research.

### 3.9 Atmospheric-Scattering Bias

A second important source of bias in ATLAS height measurements may come from atmospheric scattering of the down-going laser pulse. Scattering by ice particles in the atmosphere redirects much of the light through small angles, often less than about one degree. These photons may fall outside the field of view of the ATLAS detectors, in which case they will be lost and will have no impact on altimetry beyond attenuation of the received pulse, or they may reflect from the surface within the field of view, in which case they may then be detected by ATLAS. However, because their down-going path was longer than the assumed straight down-and-back path assumed in the PRD model, they will give erroneously long ranges, and therefore low surface heights. This effect is increasingly severe for thicker clouds, which scatter more photons, and for clouds closer to the surface, where photons scattered through large angles may still remain in the field of view.

Under cloudy conditions, the received pulse contains a mixture of scattered and unscattered photons, yielding a tail of delayed photons on the downward side of the return pulse; mean and median delays for a segment's aggregate PEs will depend on the relative fraction of the two groups of photons, and the mean path delay per photon. This process has been modeled and found to produce 1-cm level biases on ATLAS height retrievals under most circumstances (Yang and others, 2011) but since the bias may be correlated over large spatial scales it may have a non-negligible impact on continental-scale surface-change retrievals.

As is the case with the subsurface-scattering bias, parameters relating to a possible correction must be determined from datasets external to ATLAS, likely from atmospheric models that give an estimate of the cloud optical depth and the particle size. Potential corrections and data editing strategies for this effect remain an active topic of research.

### 3.10 Segment geolocation

After ground-window refinement we calculate the final location of the segment. The segment location is defined as the reference-point location plus the across-track unit vector times the mean across-track coordinate of the selected PEs.

To calculate the latitude and longitude of each segment, including the offset between the segment and the reference point, we use the latitude, longitude, and along-track distance provided by ATL03 for the selected PE. We assume that latitude and longitude for the selected PE in the segment are linear functions of along-track distance, and fit a linear function,  $f_{lat}$ , to the PE latitudes, and a second linear function,  $f_{lon}$ , to the PE longitudes, each as a function of  $x-x_0$ . The intercepts of these functions give the segment latitude and longitude.

Geolocation errors in the along- and across-track direction are calculated based on the ATL03 parameters  $\sigma_{geo\_AT}$ , and  $\sigma_{geo\_XT}$  and the radial orbit error,  $\sigma_{geo\_r}$ .

With the surface-slope vector and the geolocation estimate we can calculate the geolocation contribution to the uncertainty in the surface height:



$$\sigma_{geo,h} = \left( \sigma_{geo,r}^2 + \left( \sigma_{geo,AT} \frac{dh}{dx} \right)^2 + \left( \sigma_{geo,XT} \frac{dh}{dy} \right)^2 \right)^{1/2} \quad 36$$

859 This value is reported in the *land\_ice\_segments* group as *sigma\_geo\_h*, and the contributing  
 860 *sigma\_geo\_r*, *sigma\_geo\_xt*, and *sigma\_geo\_at* are reported in the *ground\_track* group.

### 861 3.11 Noise-corrected robust estimators of spread

862 Many of the parameters in this document are based on ordinal statistics. These statistics use the  
 863 percentiles of a distribution, which are defined based on the cumulative distribution function  
 864 (CDF) of the distribution. We define the CDF of a discrete sample of values *S* as:

$$C(x; S) = \frac{\text{the number of values in } S \text{ that are less than } x}{\text{the number of values in } S} \quad 37$$

865 For a binned distribution (e.g. a histogram or a probability distribution function),  $C(x; D(x_0))$ , we  
 866 define the CDF as

$$C(x; D(x_0)) = \frac{\int_{x_1}^x D(x') dx'}{\int_{x_1}^{x_2} D(x') dx'} \quad 38$$

867 Here are  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  are the bounds over which the distribution is defined. The percentiles of a  
 868 distribution are found by calculating the inverse function of the CDF of the distribution:

$$p(r; D) = C^{-1}\left(\frac{r}{100}; D\right) \quad 39$$

869 Thus the median of a distribution *D* is:

$$\text{Median}(D) = x \text{ such that } C(x; D) = 0.5 \quad 40$$

870 We also define the robust dispersion estimate (RDE) of a distribution as

$$RDE(D) = \frac{p(0.84; D) - p(0.16; D)}{2} \quad 41$$

871 This is analogous to the standard deviation of a normal distribution, which is equal to half the  
 872 difference between its 84<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> percentiles, but is less influenced by outlying background  
 873 values.

874

875 In most cases, distributions of ATLAS PEs include a mix of signal and noise PEs. In these  
 876 cases, the noise PEs and the signal PEs both contribute to the distribution *D*. We expect the  
 877 noise PEs are generally uniformly distributed, so we can assume that

$$C(x; D) = \frac{BGR(x - x_1) + \int_{x_1}^x D_{signal}(x')dx'}{\int_{x_1}^{x_2} D(x')dx'} \quad 42$$

878 Here  $D_{signal}$  is the distribution of the signal PEs, and BGR is the background PE rate, in units of  
879  $x^{-1}$ . We can solve this for  $C_{signal}$ :

$$C(x; D_{signal}, BGR) = \frac{\int_{x_1}^x D_{signal}(x')dx'}{N_{signal}} = \frac{\int_{x_1}^x D(x')dx' - \frac{BGR(x - x_1)}{N_{total}}}{N_{signal}} \quad 43$$

880 Here  $N_{total} = \int_{x_1}^{x_2} D(x')dx'$  and  $N_{signal} = N_{total} - (x_2 - x_1)BGR$ .

881 Estimating the percentiles of  $D_{signal}$  is complicated because  $C(x; D_{signal}, bckgrd)$  generally does  
882 not have an inverse function in  $x$ . However, if we evaluate  $C(x; D_{signal}, bckgrd)$  for a set of  
883 values,  $x_i$ , we can find  $x_{LT}$ , the largest value of  $x_i$  for which  $C(x; D_{signal}, bckgrd) < r/100$  and  $x_{GT}$ ,  
884 the first value of  $x_i$  for which  $C(x; D_{signal}, bckgrd) > r/100$ , and interpolate linearly into  $[x_{LT}, x_{GT}]$   
885 as a function of  $[C(x_{LT}; D_{signal}, bckgrd), C(x_{GT}; D_{signal}, bckgrd)]$  at the point  $r/100$ .

886 The above procedure defines the background-corrected percentiles of a distribution. Based on  
887 this we define the noise-corrected median of a distribution, which we designate:  $median(D;$   
888  $bckgrd)$ . We define the noise-corrected RDE of a distribution somewhat differently from its  
889 uncorrected counterpart. For low-noise distributions, the standard deviation of the population  
890 can accurately be estimated as half the difference between its 16<sup>th</sup> and 84<sup>th</sup> percentiles. In the  
891 presence of significant noise, the standard deviation can be estimated more accurately based on  
892 the difference between the 25<sup>th</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> percentiles of the distribution, divided by a correction  
893 factor of 1.349, equal to the width of the central 50% of a normalized Gaussian distribution.

894

895 The surface-window-refinement procedure in section 3.3.5 uses least-squares fitting and the  
896 RDE to progressively narrow the surface window. This procedure will not converge under all  
897 circumstances. Consider an initial surface window spanning from  $-H_i/2$  to  $H_i/2$ , with noise rate  
898  $R$  (in PE/m), containing  $s$  signal PEs at the center of the window. The normal (non-background-  
899 corrected) RDE will find a spread of:

$$\hat{\sigma} = 0.34 H - \frac{s}{R} \quad 44$$

900 If  $s$  is small,  $\hat{\sigma} \approx 0.34 H$  so the three-sigma interval will have a width of  $2.04 H$ , and the  
901 refinement will not converge. Convergence requires  $6\hat{\sigma} < H$ , or:

$$s > 1.73HR \quad 45$$

902 For a background rate of 10MHz (0.067 PE/m) and a weak beam (three surface PE per pulse),  
903 the procedure will converge if  $H < 26$  m. For a strong beam (10 PE per pulse), it will converge if  
904  $H < 86$  m. The convergence intervals become smaller in proportion to the signal PE count as the  
905 surface return is weakened by cloud attenuation or by reduced surface reflectance.

906 The noise-corrected RDE and median improve on the performance of their uncorrected  
 907 counterparts, but their performance is limited by the accuracy of the signal-level estimate. The  
 908 estimate of  $N_{\text{signal}}$  has an approximate error of  $(N_{\text{pulses}} (HR+s))^{1/2}$  due to the Poisson statistics of  
 909 the PE. In contrast to the non-robust RDE and median, the process works increasingly well as  
 910 more shots are aggregated, because  $N_{\text{signal}}$  increases in proportion to  $N_{\text{pulses}}$ , while its error  
 911 increases in proportion to  $N_{\text{pulses}}^{1/2}$ . If we require that  $N_{\text{pulses}} s > a\sigma_n$ , we find convergence  
 912 intervals:

$$H < \frac{N_{\text{pulses}} s^2 - a^2 s}{a^2 R} \quad 46$$

913 For 10 MHz noise, 3 PE/pulse, and for 57 pulses, this gives  $s > 3\sigma_n$  for  $H < 806$  m, implying  
 914 that the accuracy of the signal-level estimate will not be the limiting factor for any reasonable  
 915 initial window size.

916

917

## 4 ATL06 DATA PRODUCT DESCRIPTION

Here we describe how the parameters appear in the ATL06 product. The ATL06 parameters are arranged by beam, and within each beam in a number of groups and subgroups. Where parameter descriptions in the ATL06 data dictionary are considered adequate, they are not repeated in this document.

### 4.1 Data Granules

ATL06 data are provided as HDF5 files. The HDF format allows several datasets of different spatial and temporal resolutions to be included in a file. ATL06 files contain data primarily at the single-segment resolution, divided into different groups to improve the conceptual organization of the files. Each file contains data from a single cycle and a single RGT.

Within each file there are six top-level groups, each corresponding to data from GT: *gt1l*, *gt1r*, *gt2l*, etc. The subgroups within these *gtxx* groups are *segment\_quality*, *land\_ice\_segments*, and *residual\_histogram*.

In the *segment\_quality* group, the data are nearly dense, providing signal-selection and location information for every segment attempted (i.e. those that contain at least one ATL03 PE) in the granule, at the 20-meter along-track segment spacing. Datasets in this group can be used to check the geographic distribution of data gaps in the ATL06 record.

In the *land\_ice\_segments* group, data are sparse, meaning that values are reported only for those pairs for which adequate signal levels (i.e. more than 10 PE, *snr\_significance* > 0.05) were found for at least one segment: This means that within each pair, every dataset has the same number of values, and that datasets are pre-aligned between pairs, with invalid values (NaNs) posted where the algorithm provided a value for only one beam in a pair. Conversely, if neither beam in a pair successfully obtained a value for *h\_li*, that segment is skipped for both beams in the pair. The *segment\_id*, timing, and geolocation fields for the valid segments should allow the along-track structure of the data to be reconstructed within these sparse groups. For segments without valid heights that still appear on the product (because the other beam in the pair did contain a valid height) the latitude and longitude are reported for the mean location of all PE for the segment (if any PE are present) or as the location for the valid segment in the pair, displaced by the 90-meter within-pair separation (if no PE are present).

The *residual\_histogram* group is at lower resolution than the other groups, giving the distribution of PE relative to the segment heights at a horizontal resolution of 200 m, or around 280 pulses. The *segment\_id\_list*, *x\_atc\_mean*, *lat\_mean*, and *lon\_mean* fields in this group all can be used to connect the *residual\_histogram* group to the per-segment groups.

In the native format archived at the National Snow and Ice Data Center (NSIDC), each granule (file) of data contains segments from a single pass over a one-degree increment of latitude for a particular RGT, with corresponding data from all six beams. Over most of the globe, ICESat-2 travels in a roughly north-south direction, so each granule will contain approximately 111 km of data for each beam, or approximately 5660 segments. The granules containing the southernmost extent of Antarctica, south of 87S, will contain a considerably longer stretch of data, but because this area will likely be of most interest to researchers investigating continental-scale Antarctic mass balance, the additional coverage will likely be desirable. We expect that because most

users will obtain their data through subsetting services provided by the NSIDC, the native granule structure will be of minor importance.

## 4.2 Segment\_quality group

The segment\_quality group contains a nearly dense record of the success or failure of the surface-finding strategies, and gives the locations of the reference points on the RPTs. It contains a record of the success or failure of the surface-finding strategies, and gives the locations of the reference points on the RPTs.

Locations provided within this group are for the reference points on the pair tracks, not for the segments themselves. This means that both beams in a pair will have the same location (because they are not displaced relative to the reference point), and that the actual segment locations will usually be displaced from the values in *reference\_pt\_lat* and *reference\_pt\_lon* in this group by more than 45 m in the across-track direction. The laser beam and spot numbers corresponding to the ground tracks are available in the attributes of the *ground\_track* group.

**Table 4-1 Segment\_quality group**

Parameter	Units	Description
<i>delta_time</i>	seconds	Elapsed GPS seconds since the reference epoch. Use the metadata attribute <i>granule_start_seconds</i> to compute the full GPS time.
<i>segment_id</i>	unitless	segment number corresponding to the second of two ATL03 segments in the ATL06 segment, counted from the RGT equator crossing
<i>reference_pt_lat</i>	degrees	Latitude of the reference segment location on the RPT
<i>reference_pt_lon</i>	degrees	Longitude of the reference segment location on the RPT
<i>record_number</i>	unitless	For those segments that have adequate signal strength, this parameter gives the record for the pair within the other groups in the granule.
<i>signal_selection_source</i>	unitless	Indicates the last algorithm attempted to select the signal for ATL06 fitting, see table Table 3-1.

		A value of 3 indicates that all algorithms failed.
--	--	--

973

974 **4.2.1 Signal\_selection\_status subgroup**

975 This subgroup includes the *Signal\_selection\_status\_confident*, *Signal\_selection\_status\_all*, and  
 976 *Signal\_selection\_status\_backup* parameters. Their values are described in Table 3-2. Its density  
 977 structure matches that of the *segment\_quality* group.

978

979 **4.3 Land\_ice\_segments group**

980 The primary set of derived ATL06 parameters are given in the *land\_ice\_segments* group (Table  
 981 4-2). This group contains geolocation, height, and standard error and quality measures for each  
 982 segment. This group is sparse, meaning that parameters are provided only for pairs of segments  
 983 for which at least one beam has a valid surface-height measurement. This group contains the  
 984 *bias\_correction*, *fit\_statistics*, *ground\_track*, and *geophysical* subgroups, which all have the same  
 985 sparsity structure as the *land\_ice\_segments* group.

986

987

**Table 4-2 land\_ice\_segments group**

Parameter	Units	Description	Defined
<i>ATL06_quality_summary</i>	Unitless	Flag indicating: 0: No likely problems identified for the segment 1: One or more likely problems identified for the segment	4.3
<i>delta_time</i>	Seconds	Elapsed GPS seconds since the reference epoch. Use the metadata attribute <i>granule_start_seconds</i> to compute the full gpstime.	Interpolated to the segment center from ATL03
<i>h_li</i>	Meters	Standard land-ice segment height determined by land ice algorithm, corrected for first-photon bias, representing the median-based height of the selected PEs	Equation 47

<i>h_li_sigma</i>	Meters	Propagated error due to sampling error and FPB correction from the land ice algorithm	Equation 48
<i>sigma_geo_h</i>	meters	Total vertical geolocation error due to PPD and POD, including the effects of horizontal geolocation error on the segment vertical error	3.10
<i>latitude</i>	degrees north	Latitude of segment center, WGS84, North=+	3.10
<i>longitude</i>	degrees east	Longitude of segment center, WGS84, East=+	3.10
<i>segment_id</i>	counts	Segment number, counting from the equator. Equal to the <i>segment_id</i> for the second of the two 20-m ATL03 segments included in the 40-m ATL06 segment	ATL03

988

989 The standard surface height will be given on the ATL06 product as *h\_li*. This height is the  
 990 segment-center height obtained from the along-track slope fit, with the mean-median correction  
 991 applied so that it represents the median surface height for the segment. By default, *h\_li* will be  
 992 corrected for all height increments in the *geophysical* parameter group except for the ocean tide,  
 993 the equilibrium tide, and the dynamic atmosphere correction (*dac*); this includes earth, load, and  
 994 pole tides, and troposphere corrections. Since these parameters are included in the standard  
 995 ATL03 PE height, no correction is applied at the ATL06 stage. Using the names for product  
 996 variables:

$$h_{li} = h_{mean} + fpb_{med\_corr} + tx_{med\_corr} \quad 47$$

997 Tide and troposphere corrections may be removed from *h* by adding the values provided in the  
 998 ATL06 *geophysical* group. The correction values for the waveform-based corrections are  
 999 provided in the *bias\_correction* group, so that users may convert, for example, from a median-  
 1000 based height estimate to a mean-based estimate.

1001 The errors in the standard land-ice height product are calculated as the maximum of the median  
 1002 error (calculated during the first-photon-bias correction) and the linear-fit error (calculated in  
 1003 3.6), ignoring errors in the tidal and atmospheric corrections.

$$h_{li\_sigma} = \max(\sigma_{h\_fit}, fpb_{med\_corr\_sigma}) \quad 48$$

This value does not include the effects of geolocation errors on the height estimate, because while the components of  $h\_li\_sigma$  should be uncorrelated at the segment-to-segment scale, the geolocation errors are likely to be correlated on much longer scales. The vertical component of the geolocation error, as calculated from the surface-slope vector and the mean horizontal geolocation accuracies of the selected PEs are given in parameter  $sigma\_geo\_h$  (see 3.10). The error on a single segment height measurement taken independently of all adjacent measurements should be  $(h\_li\_sigma^2 + sigma\_geo\_h^2)^{1/2}$ . Averaged over several tens of segments with a consistent surface slope, the error should approach  $sigma\_geo\_h$ , but the relative scatter between individual adjacent segments should be  $h\_li\_sigma$ .

The geolocation of the segment is given in geographic coordinates by parameters *latitude* and *longitude*. These each represent the horizontal centers of the segments. The corresponding along-track coordinates are given in the *ground\_track* group as *x\_atc* and *y\_atc*.

The *land\_ice\_segments* group includes the *ATL06\_quality\_summary* parameter, which indicates the best-quality subset of all ATL06 data. A zero in this parameter implies that no data-quality tests have found a problem with the segment, a one implies that some potential problem has been found. Users who select only segments with zero values for this flag can be relatively certain of obtaining high-quality data, but will likely miss a significant fraction of usable data, particularly in cloudy, rough, or low-surface-reflectance conditions. Table 4-3 gives the parameter values needed for *ATL06\_quality\_summary* to be reported as zero. The last of these characteristics, the vertical density of photons, helps remove the effects of a common problem where the ATL03 photon selection identifies a cloud top as a likely surface return. In these cases, ATL06 can converge to a large (10+ m) vertical window containing tens of signal photons. Requiring a minimum ratio between the number of photons and the height of the window eliminates most clouds, and eliminates only a few returns from rough or steep surfaces.

**Table 4-3 Segment characteristics for *ATL06\_quality\_summary* to be zero**

Characteristic	Threshold	Description
<b>h_li_sigma</b>	< 1 m	Errors in surface height are moderate or better
<b>snr_significance</b>	< 0.02	Surface detection blunders are unlikely
<b>signal_selection_source</b>	<=1	Signal selection must be based on ATL03 photons
<b>n_fit_photons / w_surface_window_final</b>	>1 PE /m for weak beams, > 4 PE/m for strong beams	The vertical density of photons in the final surface window.



#### 4.3.1 geophysical subgroup

The *geophysical* group (Table 4-4) contains tidal and atmospheric corrections that may be added to or removed from *h\_li*, and inferred atmospheric properties that may be used to determine whether the elevation of a given segment might be affected by atmospheric forward scattering. Note that the *neutat\_delay* parameter and all *tide\_* parameters in this group are applied by default except for *tide\_ocean* and *dac* (dynamic atmosphere correction).. The sign of the parameters is such that adding the parameter value to *h\_IS* removes the correction (for applied corrections) and subtracting the parameter includes the correction (for *tide\_ocean*). These parameters are interpolated from the corresponding ATL03 parameters for the ‘nominal photons’, interpolated as a piecewise linear function of along-track distance to the segment centers. This group is sparse, meaning that parameters are provided only for pairs of segments for which at least one beam has a valid surface-height measurement.

The ocean-tide value (*tide\_ocean*) and dynamic atmosphere correction(*dac*) are provided to allow interested users to correct for tides and the inverse-barometer effect over ice shelves. These parameter are not applied because the locations of ice-sheet grounding lines (defining the inland extent of floating ice shelves) are not always precisely known, and may change over time. Different users will want to apply the ocean-tide model to different areas within the grounding zone.

This group also include parameters related to solar background and parameters indicative of the presence or absence of clouds. Some of these parameters are derived from the ATLAS atmospheric channel, and should help identify segments strongly affected by clouds or blowing snow: parameters *cloud\_flg\_asr* and *cloud\_flg\_atm* give estimates of the probability of clouds between ATLAS and the ground, based on the apparent surface reflectance and on atmospheric backscatter, respectively. Their values are described in the ATL09 ATBD, and should be evaluated against the standard that cloud optical thickness greater than 0.5 in the lower 3 km of the atmosphere is required to produce a substantial altimetry error. (Yang and others, 2011) . Note that over surfaces other than bright snow (e.g. over blue ice or dirty snow) the *cloud\_flg\_asr* may indicate clouds when none are present.

Blowing snow has a larger potential to produce altimetry errors, and has been assigned its own flag; the estimated height of a detected blowing-snow layer is given in *bsnow\_h*, which is set to zero if no such layer can be detected; the confidence with which a blowing-snow layer can be detected or ruled out is given in *bsnow\_conf*. For both flags, cautious users may require a value of 0 or 1 (clear with high/medium confidence) but under sunlit conditions, neither flag may clearly indicate cloud-free conditions. The estimated optical thickness of blowing snow layers, if found, is given in *bsnow\_od*.

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1069

**Table 4-4 geophysical subgroup**

Parameter	Units	Description	Defined
<i>bckgrd</i>	Hz	Background count rate, derived from the ATL03 50-shot average, interpolated to the segment center.	Interpolated from ATL03
<i>bsnow_conf</i>	unitless	Blowing snow confidence. -3=surface not detected; -2=no surface wind; -1=no scattering layer found; 0=no top layer found; 1=none-little; 2=weak; 3=moderate; 4=moderate-high; 5=high; 6=very high	ATL09
<i>bsnow_od</i>	unitless	Blowing snow layer optical depth	ATL09
<i>bsnow_h</i>	meters	Blowing snow layer top height	ATL09
<i>cloud_flg_asr</i>	counts	Cloud flag (probability) from apparent surface reflectance. 0=clear with high confidence; 1=clear with medium confidence; 2=clear with low confidence; 3=cloudy with low confidence; 4=cloudy with medium confidence; 5=cloudy with high confidence	ATL09
<i>cloud_flg_atm</i>	counts	Number of layers found from the backscatter profile using the DDA layer finder.	ATL09
<i>layer_flag</i>	counts	This flag is a combination of multiple flags ( <i>cloud_flag_atm</i> , <i>cloud_flag_asr</i> , and <i>bsnow_con</i> ) and takes daytime/nighttime into consideration. A value of 1 means clouds or blowing snow are likely present. A value of 0 indicates the likely absence of clouds or blowing snow.	ATL09

<i>e_bckgrd</i>	Hz	Expected background count rate based on sun angle, surface slope, for unit surface reflectance	Calculated following ATL07
<i>msw_flag</i>	unitless	Multiple Scattering warning flag. The multiple scattering warning flag (ATL09 parameter <i>msw_flag</i> ) has values from -1 to 5 where zero means no multiple scattering and 5 the greatest. If no layers were detected, then <i>msw_flag</i> = 0. If blowing snow is detected and its estimated optical depth is greater than or equal to 0.5, then <i>msw_flag</i> = 5. If the blowing snow optical depth is less than 0.5, then <i>msw_flag</i> = 4. If no blowing snow is detected but there are cloud or aerosol layers detected, the <i>msw_flag</i> assumes values of 1 to 3 based on the height of the bottom of the lowest layer: < 1 km, <i>msw_flag</i> = 3; 1-3 km, <i>msw_flag</i> = 2; > 3km, <i>msw_flag</i> = 1. A value of -1 indicates that the signal to noise of the data was too low to reliably ascertain the presence of cloud or blowing snow. We expect values of -1 to occur only during daylight.	ALT09
<i>r_eff</i>	unitless	Effective reflectance, uncorrected for atmospheric effects.	Equation 33
<i>solar_azimuth</i>	degrees_east	The direction, eastwards from north, of the sun vector as seen by an observer at the laser ground spot.	ATL03 <i>solar_azimuth</i> parameter, interpolated to the segment center from the reference photons
<i>solar_elevation</i>	degrees	Solar Angle above or below the plane tangent to the ellipsoid surface at the laser spot. Positive values mean the sun is above the horizon, while negative values mean it is below the horizon. The effect of atmospheric refraction is not included. This is a low-precision value,	ATL03 <i>solar_elevation</i> parameter, interpolated to the segment center from the reference photon

		with approximately TBD degree accuracy.	
<i>tide_earth</i>	meters	Earth tide	Inherited from ATL03
<i>dac</i>	meters	dynamic atmosphere correction	Inherited from ATL03
<i>tide_load</i>	meters	Load Tide	Inherited from ATL03
<i>tide_ocean</i>	meters	Ocean Tide	Inherited from ATL03
<i>tide_pole</i>	meters	Pole Tide	Inherited from ATL03
<i>tide_equilibrium</i>	meters	Equilibrium tide	Inherited from ATL03
<i>neutat_delay_total</i>	meters	Total neutral atmospheric delay correction (wet+dry)	Inherited from ATL03

1070

1071 In some circumstances, the estimated background rate may also give an indication of cloud  
 1072 conditions. The estimated background rate is provided in parameter *bckgrd*, which may be  
 1073 compared with the background rate expected for a unit-reflectance Lambertian surface, with a  
 1074 slope equal to the measured surface slope, *E\_bckgrd*. In sunlit conditions, these parameters  
 1075 together allow an estimate of the total sub-satellite reflectance. The effective, uncorrected surface  
 1076 reflectance, *r\_eff*, based on first-photon-bias-corrected PE count and the range to the ground,  
 1077 may be compared to these numbers; if *bckgrd* is approximately equal to *e\_bckgrd*, the  
 1078 atmosphere and the surface must together have a reflectance close to unity; if *r\_eff* is  
 1079 approximately equal to unity, this indicates that the surface below the satellite is likely snow, and  
 1080 likely cloud free; if *bckgrd* is approximately equal to *e\_bckgrd* and *r\_eff* is small, clouds must be  
 1081 present, and if *bckgrd* is less than *e\_bckgrd*, the surface must be dark, and, most likely not snow  
 1082 covered.

1083 Also included in this group are the solar azimuth (*solar\_azimuth*) and elevation  
 1084 (*solar\_elevation*), used in estimating the expected background rates.

#### 1085 4.3.2 ground\_track subgroup

1086 The *ground\_track* subgroup (Table 4-5) contains parameters describing the GT and RGT for  
 1087 each segment, as well as angular information about the beams. All the components needed to  
 1088 identify a given segment's orbit number, reference track, pair track, and beam number are given,  
 1089 along with the azimuth and elevation of the beam relative to the ellipsoid surface normal. The  
 1090 orientation of the RPT with respect to local north is given in *seg\_azimuth*.

Note that in land-ice products, the ground tracks and pair tracks are numbered separately from the laser beams: the ground tracks are numbered from left to right relative to RGT, and the ground track number is associated with group names within the product: From left to right, they are *gt1l*, *gt1r*, *gt2l*, *gt2r*, *gt3l*, and *gt3r*. The laser beams are numbered from left to right relative to the spacecraft flight direction. When the spacecraft is flying with its x axis pointing forwards, the beam numbers are in the same order (beam numbers 1...6 correspond to tracks *gt1l*...*gt3r*), but when it is in the opposite orientation, the laser-beam numbers are reversed relative to the ground-track numbers (beam numbers 1...6 correspond to tracks *gt3r*...*gt1l*).

This group is sparse, meaning that parameters are provided only for pairs of segments for which at least one beam has a valid surface-height measurement. Data-set attributes give:

-the reference ground track number

-the correspondence between laser beam numbers and ground tracks

-the cycle number

The RMS accuracy of the horizontal geolocation for the segment is described by the geolocation error ellipse, which is calculated based on the PE-medians of the ATL03 parameters *sigma\_geo\_xt*, *sigma\_geo\_at* and *sigma\_geo\_r*. The along-track and across-track coordinates of the segments are provided by parameters *x\_atc* and *y\_atc*.

**Table 4-5 *ground\_track* subgroup**

Parameter	Units	Description	Derived
<i>ref_azimuth</i>	degrees	The direction, eastwards from north, of the laser beam vector as seen by an observer at the laser ground spot viewing toward the spacecraft (i.e., the vector from the ground to the spacecraft).	ATL03
<i>ref_coelv</i>	degrees	Coelevation (CE) is direction from vertical of the laser beam as seen by an observer located at the laser ground spot.	ATL03
<i>seg_azimuth</i>	degrees	The azimuth of the pair track, east of local north	3.1.2.2
<i>sigma_geo_at</i>	meters	Geolocation error in the along-track direction	3.10
<i>sigma_geo_xt</i>	meters	Geolocation error in the across-track direction	3.10

<i>sigma_geo_r</i>	Meters	Radial orbit error	3.10
<i>x_atc</i>	meters	The along-track x-coordinate of the segment, measured parallel to the RGT, measured from the ascending node of the equatorial crossing of a given RGT	3.1.2.2
<i>y_atc</i>	meters	Along-track y coordinate of the segment, relative to the RGT, measured along the perpendicular to the RGT, positive to the right of the RGT.	3.1.2.2

1108

1109 **4.3.3 bias\_correction subgroup**

1110 The *bias\_correction* subgroup (Table 4-6) contains information about the estimated first-photon  
1111 bias, and the transmit-pulse-shape bias. The standard correction applied in *h\_li* is  
1112 *fpb\_med\_corr*+*tx\_med\_corr*, and its error is *fpb\_med\_corr\_sigma*. The alternate, mean-based  
1113 correction, is *fpb\_mean\_corr*, with error *fpb\_mean\_corr\_sigma*. The median-based elevation,  
1114 without the first-photon-bias correction, may be recovered by subtracting *fpb\_med\_corr* and  
1115 adding *med\_r\_fit*. For example, users who prefer to use the mean statistics instead of the median  
1116 statistics would use *h\_li* - *fpb\_med\_corr* - *tx\_med\_corr* + *fpb\_mean\_corr* + *tx\_mean\_corr* as their  
1117 height estimate.

1118 The corrected photon count is given as *fpb\_n\_corr*; this gives an estimate of the number of  
1119 photons in the surface window as estimated during the FPB correction. The transmit-pulse-shape  
1120 corrections (*tx\_med\_corr* and *tx\_mean\_corr*) are also given.

1121

**Table 4-6 *bias\_correction* subgroup**

Parameter	Units	Description	Derived
<i>fpb_mean_corr</i>	meters	First-photon bias correction to the mean segment height	3.4.3.1
<i>fpb_mean_corr_sigma</i>	meters	Estimated error in <i>fpb_mean_corr</i>	3.4.3.1
<i>fpb_med_corr</i>	meters	First-photon-bias correction giving the difference between the	3.4.3.2

		mean segment height and the corrected median height	
<i>fpb_med_corr_sigma</i>	meters	Estimated error in <i>fpb_med_corr</i>	3.4.3.2
<i>fpb_n_corr</i>	counts	Estimated window photon count after first-photon-bias correction	3.4.3.3
<i>med_r_fit</i>	meters	Difference between uncorrected mean and median of linear-fit residuals	3.3.5.2
<i>tx_med_corr</i>	meters	Estimate of the difference between the full-waveform transmit-pulse mean and the median of a broadened, truncated waveform consistent with the received pulse	3.5
<i>tx_mean_corr</i>	meters	Estimate of the difference between the full-waveform transmit-pulse mean and the mean of a broadened, truncated waveform consistent with the received pulse	3.5

1122

1123 **4.3.4 fit\_statistics subgroup**

1124 The *fit\_statistics* subgroup gives a variety of parameters describing the segment fit and its  
 1125 residuals. These parameters may be used to determine whether a particular segment is  
 1126 potentially usable if it is not identified as problem-free in the  
 1127 *land\_ice\_segments/ATL06\_quality\_summary* flag.

**Table 4-7 fit\_statistics subgroup**

Parameter	units	Description
<i>dh_fit_dx</i>	unitless	Along-track slope from along-track segment fit

<i>dh_fit_dx_sigma</i>	Unitless	Propagated error in the along-track segment slope
<i>dh_fit_dy</i>	Unitless	Across-track slope from segment fits to weak and strong beams; the same slope is reported for both laser beams in each pair
<i>signal_selection_source</i>	Unitless	Flag describing the source of the information used to select the signal PE. See Table 3-1
<i>signal_selection_source_status</i>	Unitless	Indicates the status of the last signal selection algorithm attempted (see <i>signal_selection_source</i> ). Values for this flag are given in the sections of Table 3-2.
<i>h_mean</i>	meters	Mean surface height, not corrected for first-photon bias or pulse truncation.
<i>sigma_h_mean</i>	meters	Propagated height error due to PE-height sampling error for height from the along-track fit, not including geolocation-induced error
<i>h_expected_rms</i>	meters	Expected RMS misfit between PE heights and along-track segment fit
<i>h_rms_misfit</i>	meters	RMS misfit between PE heights and along-track segment fit
<i>h_robust_sprd</i>	meters	RDE of misfit between PE heights and the along-track segment fit.
<i>n_seg_pulses</i>	counts (pulse ID)	The number of pulses potentially included in the segment (floating-point number)



<i>n_fit_photons</i>	counts	Number of PEs used in determining h_li after editing
<i>w_surface_window_final</i>	meters	Width of the surface window, top to bottom
<i>snr</i>	unitless	Signal-to-noise ratio in the final refined window
<i>snr_significance</i>	unitless	Probability that signal-finding routine would converge to at least the observed SNR for a random-noise input. Small values indicate a small likelihood of a surface-detection blunder.

1128

1129 **4.3.5 DEM subgroup**

1130 This subgroup (Table 4-8) contains DEM elevations interpolated at the segment centers. It  
 1131 contains only three parameters: the DEM elevation (*dem\_h*), the geoid height (*geoid\_h*), and the  
 1132 DEM source (*dem\_flag*). The best DEMs available in time for the ICESat-2 launch may be  
 1133 significantly better than those available at present (February 2015), but the best current choices  
 1134 are:

- 1135 • For Antarctica, the REMA DEM : <https://www.pgc.umn.edu/data/rema/>, filtered to 40-m  
 1136 resolution before interpolation to the ICESat-2 segment centers, with gaps filled with  
 1137 ATL06 data from cycles 1 and 2.
- 1138 • For the Arctic, the Arctic DEM, based on stereophotogrammetry  
 1139 <https://www.pgc.umn.edu/data/arcticdem>. The DEM should be filtered to 40-m  
 1140 resolution before interpolation to the ICESat-2 reference points.
- 1141 • For areas outside the poles, a multi-sensor global DEM, posted at 7.5 arcsec  
 1142 ([http://topotools.cr.usgs.gov/gmted\\_viewer](http://topotools.cr.usgs.gov/gmted_viewer)).

1143 This group is sparse, meaning that parameters are provided only for pairs of segments for which  
 1144 at least one beam has a valid surface-height measurement.

Table 4-8 DEM subgroup

Parameter	Description
<i>dem_h</i>	Height of the DEM, interpolated by cubic-spline interpolation in the DEM coordinate system to the PE location

<i>dem_flag</i>	source for the DEM. 1=Antarctic DEM, 2=Arctic DEM, 3=global DEM.
<i>geoid_h</i>	Geoid height, meters

1145

1146 **4.4 residual\_histogram group**

1147 This group contains histograms of the residuals between PE heights and the least-squares fit  
 1148 segment heights, at 200-meter along-track resolution. It is intended to allow visualization of the  
 1149 surface-return shapes, and investigation of changes in the return pulse shape or of near-surface  
 1150 scattering, such as that due to dense blowing snow. Each column of the histogram gives the  
 1151 number of PE in a set of bins distributed between -50 and +50 m around the surface. The  
 1152 distribution of these bins is as follows:

1153 From 50 to 20 m below the surface, bins are spaced at 1 m

1154 From 20 m to 10 m below the surface, bins are spaced at 0.5 m

1155 From 10 m to 4 m below the surface, bins are spaced at 0.25 m

1156 From 4 m to 2 m below the surface, bins are spaced at 2 cm

1157 From 2 m below the surface to 2 m above the surface, bins are spaced at 1 cm

1158 From 2 m to 4 m above the surface, bins are spaced at 2 cm

1159 From 4 to 10 m above the surface, bins are spaced at 0.25 m

1160 From 10 to 20 m above the surface, bins are spaced at 0.5 m

1161 From 20 m above the surface to 50 m above the surface, bins are spaced at 1 m.

1162 This distribution of bin edges gives 749 (*N\_bins*) vertical bins, with 750 edges. The heights of  
 1163 the bin tops are given in the *bin\_top\_h* parameter, listed in order from bottom to top. For any bin  
 1164 in the histogram, the bottom elevation is equal to the top of the previous bin, and the elevation of  
 1165 the bottom of the bottom bin is 1 m below its top. The residuals from collections of 10 along-  
 1166 track ATL06 segments are combined into each histogram; because adjacent ATL06 segments  
 1167 overlap by 50%, only those PE within 10 m of each segment center in the along-track direction  
 1168 are included in the histograms. Only those segments with high-quality signals  
 1169 (ATL06\_quality\_summary = 0) are included in the histogram, and a list of the *segment\_id* values  
 1170 of included segments is provided in the group (recall that the *segment\_id* for a segment  
 1171 corresponds to the second of the two ATL03 segments included in each ATL06 segment). To  
 1172 allow reconstruction of the per-pulse signal levels, the sum of the number of pulses in the valid  
 1173 segments is given for each histogram, and the *background\_per\_m* parameter is given to indicate  
 1174 the number of background photons expected in each vertical meter of each histogram. The  
 1175 expected number of photons in each histogram bin can be found by multiplying the height  
 1176 difference between the edges of the bin by *background\_per\_m*. The counts for any histogram

1177 bins that are not entirely encompassed by at least one of the two possible telemetry band window  
 1178 ranges are marked as invalid.  
 1179

Table 4-9 Parameters in the *residual\_histogram* group

Parameter	Dimensions	Description
<i>count</i>	N_bins x N_hist	Residual count in 1-cm bins, for PE within 10 (horizontal) m of segment centers for each histogram. Bin-top heights may be found in <i>residual_histogram/bin_top_h</i> .
<i>delta_time</i>	1xN_hist	Elapsed GPS seconds since the reference epoch. Use the metadata attribute <i>granule_start_seconds</i> to compute the full gpstime. Calculated from the mean of the <i>delta_time</i> for the segments in each histogram bin.
<i>bin_top_h</i>	N_bins	Height of the top of each histogram bin, listed in increasing order. The bottom of each bin is equal to the top of the next-lowest bin, and the bottom of the lowest bin is 1 m below its top
<i>bckgrd_per_m</i>	1xN_hist	Number of background PE expected for each vertical meter of the histogram based on the observed background rate ( <i>bckgrd</i> )
<i>segment_id_list</i>	10xN_hist	Segments ids included in each column of the histogram
<i>lat_mean</i>	1x N_hist	Mean latitude of the segments included in the histogram
<i>lon_mean</i>	1x N_hist	Mean longitude of the segments included in the histogram
<i>pulse_count</i>	1xN_hist	Number of pulses potentially included in the histogram (pulses are counted if they are in the central 20 m of each segment, even if no PE from the pulse are selected)

<i>x_atc_mean</i>	1x N_hist	Mean along-track coordinate of the segments included in the histogram.
-------------------	-----------	--

1180

1181

## **5 ALGORITHM IMPLEMENTATION: LAND ICE HEIGHT (ATL 06/L3A)**

This section gives detailed procedures for estimating heights from ATL03 PEs. The procedures are presented as an outline of the steps that need to be programmed to calculate the main parameters from each group; we assume that after interaction with the programming team these outlines will be updated to ensure their accuracy and consistency with the rest of this document.

### **5.1 Outline of Procedure**

The following steps are performed for each along-track reference point:

1. PEs from the current cycle falling into the along-track bin for the along-track point are collected
2. The initial height and along-track slope are estimated for each beam in the pair
3. The heights and surface windows are iteratively refined for each beam in the pair
4. Corrections for subsurface scattering, first-photon bias, median offsets, and error estimates are calculated for each beam based on the edited PEs
5. The across-track slope is calculated

Steps 1-5 are described in the “Processing Procedure” subsection.

### **5.2 Input Parameters**

Steps 1-6 in 5.1.1 can be calculated based on ATL03 inputs. Steps 5 and 6 require information about the background rate, which is provided with the atmospheric data

**Table 5-1** lists parameters needed from ATL03 and ATL09 for generation of ATL06.

Individual PE heights, times, IDs, and geolocations are provided by ATL03. A variety of tidal and atmospheric-delay parameters are derived from subsamples of ATL03 fields or by interpolation into data tables used during ATL03 processing. Some ATL03 parameters are provided for every PE (e.g. height and horizontal position). These are averaged over the selected PEs for each segment. Others are provided for ‘reference’ photons spaced approximately every 40 m along track. For these fields, ATL06 values are interpolated as a function of along-track  $x$  from the values for the ‘nominal’ photons to the segment centers.

In addition, parameters from the atmospheric channel are used to define the blowing-snow height parameter, the blowing-snow confidence parameter, and the cloud-flag confidence parameter.

The 200-Hz background-rate parameter is used to estimate background rates for each segment, as is the 50-Hz background-rate parameter based on the full atmospheric window. An estimate of the optical depth for the 3 km above the ground and a blowing-snow height estimate and confidence flag are also calculated based on ATL09 parameters.

The transmit-pulse shape is used to correct the truncated means and medians used in estimating the surface shape to reduce potential biases in the recovered surface height.

Table 5-1. Inputs for ATL06

Parameter	Source	Description
podppd flag	/gtxx/geolocation/podppd_flag	Flag indicating low/high quality geolocation
Segment_ID	ATL03: /gtxx/geolocation	ATL03 segment ID
Ph_index_beg	ATL03: /gtxx/geolocation	First photon in the segment
Segment_ph_cnt	ATL03: /gtxx/geolocation	Number of PE in each segment
Segment_dist_x	ATL03: /gtxx/geolocation	Along-track distance for each ATL03 segment
Segment_length	ATL03: /gtxx/geolocation	Along-track length of each ATL03 segment.
Velocity_sc	ATL03: /gtxx/geolocation	Spacecraft ground speed
Sigma_across	ATL03: /gtxx/geolocation	across-track component of geolocation error
Sigma_along	ATL03: /gtxx/geolocation	Along-track component of geolocation error
Sigma_h	ATL03: /gtxx/geolocation	Vertical component of geolocation error
Delta_time	ATL03: /gtxx/geolocation	Time for each PE
H_ph	ATL03: /gtxx/heights	WGS-84 PE height
Lat_ph	ATL03:	PE latitude

	/gtxx/heights	
Lon_ph	ATL03: /gtxx/heights	PE longitude
Signal_conf_ph	ATL03: /gtxx/heights	Signal-classification confidence
Ph_id_channel	ATL03: /gtxx/heights	Channel number for each PE
Ph_id_pulse	ATL03: /gtxx/heights	Pulse number for the current PE
Pce_mframe_cnt	ATL03: /gtxx/heights	Major frame number for the current PE
Dist_ph_along	ATL03: /gtxx/heights	Along-track distance relative to the current segment start
Dist_ph_across	ATL03: /gtxx/heights	Along-track distance relative to the RGT
bckgrd_rate	ATL03: /gtxx/bckgrd_atlas	Background rate calculated from the 50-pulse altimetric histogram
delta_time (corresponding to bckgrd_rate)	ATL03: /gtxx/bckgrd_atlas	Time for the first shot in the 50-pulse altimetric histogram
DEM elevation	Standard DEMs	Best-available DEMs (see 4.3.5) interpolated to each segment location
Tide model values	ATL03: /gtxx/geophys_corr	Various tide-model parameters
Tep_hist	ATL03: Atlas_impulse_response/ beam_x/histogram	Transmitter-echo-pulse histogram for the strong/weak spot (should match current spot)

Tep_hist_x	ATL03: Atlas_impulse_response/ beam_x/histogram	Times for transmitter-echo-pulse histogram bins
Tep_bckgrd	ATL03: Atlas_impulse_response/ beam_x/histogram	Transmitter-echo-pulse per-bin background count
Tep_tod	ATL03: Atlas_impulse_response/ beam_x/histogram	Day/time for the TEP measurement used
Channel dead-time estimates	ATL03	dead-time estimates for each channel, from ATL03 parameters /atlas_impulse_response/dead_time
Blowing-snow flag	ATL09	Blowing-snow flag
Blowing-snow confidence	ATL09	Blowing-snow confidence
Cloud flag	ATL09	Cloud flag and confidence

1216

1217 Note that some parameters that are provided for each segment in ATL03 are needed for each PE  
 1218 in ATL06. For example, the along-track distance for a PE is the sum of *segment\_dist\_x*  
 1219 (provided per segment) and *dist\_ph\_along* (provided for each PE). To allow us to access these  
 1220 fields, we generate an internal *ph\_seg\_num* variable, based on the ATL03  
 1221 *geolocation/ph\_index\_beg* variables, assigning all photons between the *i*-th value of  
 1222 *geolocation/ph\_index\_beg* and 1 less than the *i+1*-th value a *ph\_seg\_num* value of *i*. The  
 1223 background rate is provided in ATL03 on a 50-shot sampling interval; we convert this to the per-  
 1224 PE rate by interpolating as a function of *delta\_time*.

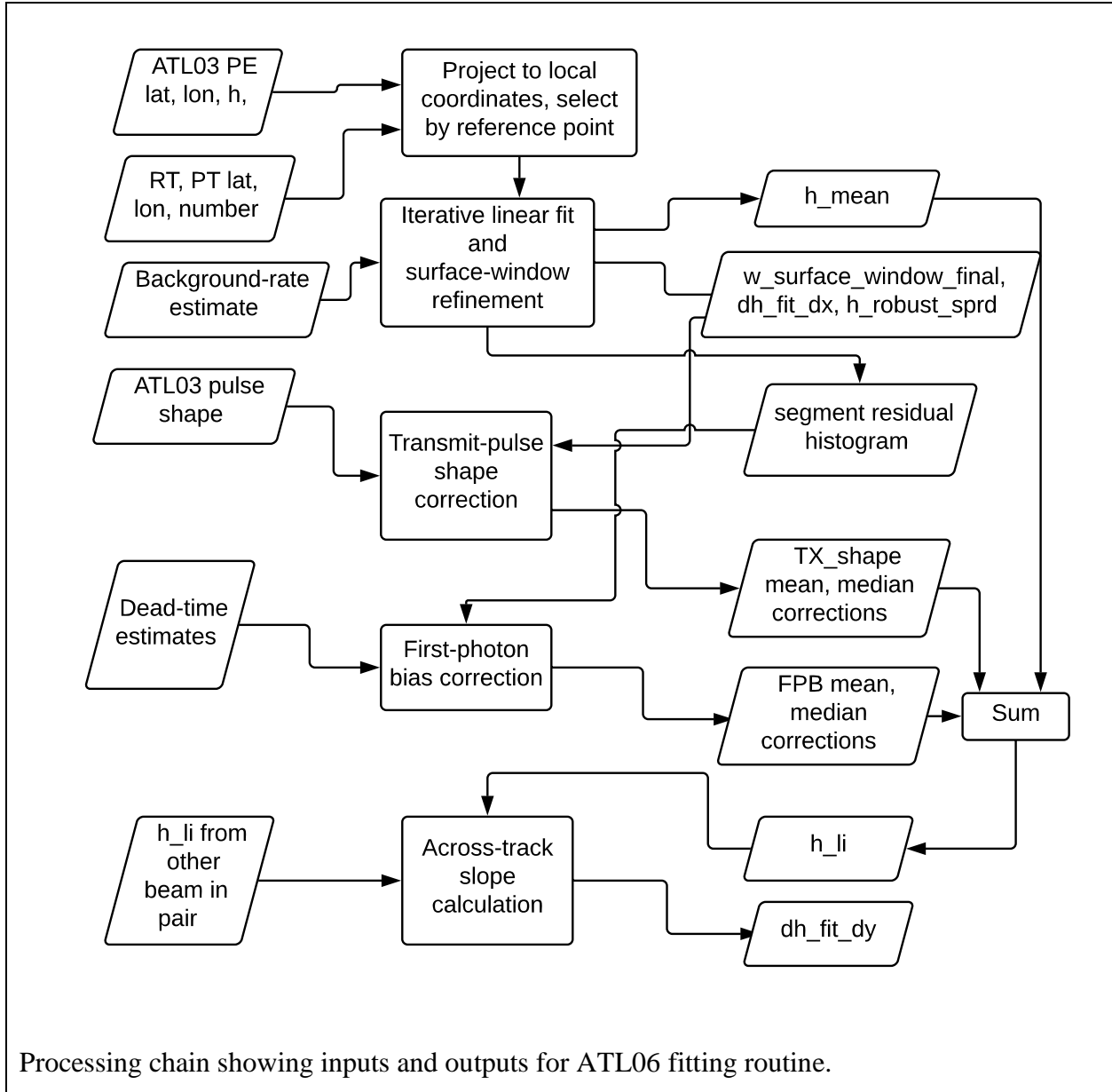
1225

### 1226 5.3 Processing Procedure for Parameters

1227 In this section, we give pseudocode for the calculation of ATL06 parameters. The flow chart for  
 1228 this process is summarized in Figure 5-1. The code is made up of several functions that call one  
 1229 another, following the process described in Section 5.1.

Figure 5-1. Flow chart for top-level ATL06 processing





1230

#### 1231 5.4 Top-Level Fitting Routine

1232 This routine calls the other routines in the processing chain to derive the final heights and  
 1233 corrections. It corresponds to all the steps described in 3.2.

1234

1235 **Inputs**, for each beam, for ATL03 segments  $m-1$  and  $m$ :

1236  $x_{PE}$ : along-track coordinates of the land-ice PEs, meters

1237  $y_{PE}$ : across-track coordinates of the land-ice PEs, meters

1238 *h\_PE*: heights of the PE, meters

1239 *t\_PE*: times for PE.

1240 *Ice\_confidence\_flag* : Confidence with which the PE has been identified as coming from  
1241 the surface, unitless

1242 *bckgrd* : estimated background PE rate for the current segment, counts/second

1243 *ch\_deadtime*: Deadtime estimate for each channel

1244 *x0\_seg* : along-track coordinate of the current reference point

1245 *bckgrd\_rate*: 50-shot-resolution background rate, derived from ATL03, interpolated to  
1246 the center of the segment.

1247 *Spacecraft\_ground\_speed*: The speed of the nadir point below the spacecraft as it moves  
1248 along the geoid.

1249 *Podppd\_flag*: ATL03 flag indicating high or low quality geolocation

1250 **Outputs** (repeated for left and right beams)

1251 *delta\_time*: time offset with respect to the beginning of the granule

1252 *h\_li* : land-ice height, meters

1253 *h\_li\_sigma* : error in the ice-sheet height, meters

1254 *h\_robust\_sprd* : ice-sheet residual robust spread, meters

1255 *h\_rms\_misfit* : RMS residual for the residual spread, meters

1256 *n\_fit\_photons*: The number of photons used to define the segment.

1257 *w\_surface\_window* : width of the refined window used to select PEs, meters

1258 *h\_expected\_rms* : expected standard deviation of PEs based on surface geometry and  
1259 signal levels, meters

1260 *dh\_fit\_dx* : along-track slope for the segment, unitless

1261 *signal\_selection* parameters : parameters indicating how the initial PE were selected

1262 *fpb\_corr\_mean* : first-photon bias correction for the mean surface height, meters

1263 *fpb\_corr\_median*: first-photon bias correction for the median surface height, meters

1264 *tx\_median\_corr*: return-truncation correction to the median-based segment height

1265 *tx\_mean\_corr*: return-truncation correction to the mean-based segment height

1266 *fpb\_n\_corr* : corrected PE count from the first-photon bias, meters

1267 *y\_seg\_RGT*: segment across-track coordinate

1268 *lat\_seg\_center*: segment-center latitude

1269 *lon\_seg\_center*: segment-center longitude

1270 *tide* and *dac* parameters: geophysical parameters that are averaged and passed on from  
1271 ATL03

1272 *SNR*: Estimated signal-to-noise ratio for the segment

1273 *atl06\_quality\_summary*: Summary parameter indicating whether a problem in the  
1274 segment fitting was identified

1275 **Output** for both beams together:

1276 *dh\_fit\_dy* : across-track slope, unitless

1277 **Internal variable**, that is tracked through the fitting procedure:

1278 *h\_range\_input*: The range of heights provided as an input to the fitting algorithm.

1279 **Parameters:**

1280 *granule\_start\_time*: the starting time of the granule

1281 *dx\_seg* = 40 meters

1282 *sigma\_beam*: sigma value for pulse surface footprint (expected to be equal to 4.25 m)

1283 *SNR\_F\_table*: 3-d table giving the probability of finding a segment with the given SNR  
1284 for noise-only inputs

1285 *PRF*: Pulse repetition frequency for ATLAS (equal to 10,000 s<sup>-1</sup>)

1286 **Procedure:**

1287 1. Select PE for the initial fit.

1288 1a. If the *podppd\_flag* indicates degraded geolocation for any pulses, skip to the next  
1289 segment.

1290 1b. For each beam, select PE with ATL03 *segment\_id* of *m* or *m-1*. Set *h\_range\_input*  
1291 equal to the difference between the maximum and minimum of the PE heights. Eliminate any  
1292 photons that are identified by ATL03 as part of the TEP.

1293 1c. Set initial values for the geolocation and time parameters: set *lat\_seg\_center*,  
1294 *lon\_seg\_center* and *delta\_time* to the means of the corresponding reference photon values.

1295 1d. Calculate *n\_seg\_pulses* based on the spacecraft ground speed, and the lengths of  
1296 segments *m-1* and *m*: *n\_seg\_pulses*=(sum of segment lengths \* *PRF*)/*spacecraft\_ground\_speed*.

1297 1e Based on the *ice\_confidence\_flag* values (see **PE selection based on ATL03 flags**),  
1298 and assign values to *signal\_selection\_source*, *signal\_selection\_status\_confident*, and  
1299 *signal\_selection\_status\_all*. If *signal\_selection\_source* is equal to 0 or 1, set *h\_range\_input* equal  
1300 to *H\_win*.

1301 1f. If both *signal\_selection\_status\_confident* and *signal\_selection\_status\_all* are nonzero,  
1302 select PE using the **backup PE selection** routine. If *signal\_selection\_status\_backup* is greater  
1303 than 1, skip fitting for the current beam and reference point, report invalid for *h\_mean*, and for  
1304 *n\_fit\_photons*. If *signal\_selection\_status\_backup* is equal to 0 set *h\_range\_input* equal to  
1305 *H\_win*.

1306 Note: If  $h\_range\_input$  is not set in 1d or 1e, it remains equal to the value set in 1a: the  
1307 difference between the maximum and minimum heights of all photons found in segments  $m$  and  
1308  $m-1$ .

1309

1310 Output values assigned:  $signal\_selection\_source$ ,  $signal\_selection\_status\_confident$ ,  
1311  $signal\_selection\_status\_all$ ,  $signal\_selection\_status\_backup$ .

1312 Internal values assigned:  $PE\_selection\_flag$ .

1313 2. For each beam, estimate the surface height and slope using the **iterative least-squares fitting**  
1314 routine. Set  $n\_fit\_photons$  to the number of PE in the final selection. If the final selection  
1315 includes fewer than 10 PE, or if the along-track spread is less than 20 m, or if the final window  
1316 width is larger than 20 m, report an invalid fit and set  $h\_mean$  to its invalid value (NaN) and  
1317 return.

1318 Output values assigned, for each beam:  $n\_fit\_photons$ ,  $dh\_fit\_dx$ ,  $h\_mean$ ,  $h\_rms\_misfit$ ,  
1319  $h\_robust\_sprd$ ,  $med\_r\_fit$ ,  $w\_surface\_window\_final$ ,  $SNR$ .

1320 Internal values assigned, for each beam:  $h\_mean$ ,  $r\_fit$ ,  $selected\_PE$ ,  $h\_range\_input$

1321

1322 3. For each beam, calculate the first-photon bias correction

1323 For each beam, estimate the first-photon bias correction to the mean height, the first-  
1324 photon-bias corrected median height, and the corrected return-time histogram based on the  
1325 residuals to the segment heights calculated in step 3.

1326 3a. Run the first-photon-bias-correction routine on PE flagged with  $selected\_PE$  (see  
1327 below)

1328 Internal values assigned: fpb-corrected residual histogram, estimated gain.

1329 Output values assigned for each beam:  $fpb\_mean\_corr$ ,  $fpb\_mean\_corr\_sigma$ ,  
1330  $fpb\_median\_corr$ ,  $fpb\_median\_corr\_sigma$ ,  $FPB\_N\_PE$

1331

1332 4. Calculate the pulse-truncation correction

1333 Based on the  $h\_robust\_sprd$  and  $w\_surface\_window\_final$  values calculated in the last  
1334 step of the iterative least-squares fit and the  $SNR$  calculated in step 2, calculate the pulse-  
1335 truncation correction (See pulse-truncation-correction section).

1336 Output values assigned for each beam:  $tx\_med\_corr$ ,  $tx\_mean\_corr$

1337

1338 5. Calculate remaining output parameters

1339 5a. Calculate  $h\_li$ :

1340 
$$h\_li = h\_mean + fpb\_med\_corr + tx\_med\_corr$$

1341 Output values assigned:  $h\_li$

1342

1343           5b. Calculate *y\_seg\_RGT*, equal to the median of all *y\_PE\_RGT* values.

1344   Output values assigned: *y\_seg\_RGT*

1345           5c. Calculate *seg\_time*, *lat\_seg\_center* and *lon\_seg\_center* by regressing (respectively)  
1346 *time\_PE*, *lat\_PE* and *lon\_PE* as a function of *x\_PE* to *x0\_seg* for selected PE. For those  
1347 segments for which fitting has failed, but for which the other beam in the pair has a valid  
1348 segment, report the latitude and longitude of the valid segment, displaced by 90 m to the left or  
1349 right in the across-track direction (depending on which segment is valid).

1350   Output values assigned: *seg\_time*, *lat\_seg\_center*, *lon\_seg\_center*, *delta\_time*

1351           5d. Estimate the final cross-track slope, equal to the difference between the *h\_li* values  
1352 divided by the difference between the *y\_seg\_RGT* values for the two beams.

1353   Output values assigned: *dh\_fit\_dy*

1354           5e. Calculate error estimates for each beam.

1355           *i.* For each segment, calculate *h\_expected\_RMS* based on the footprint size, the along-  
1356 track track slope, and the transmit pulse duration (equation 1):

1357           
$$h\_expected\_RMS = \sqrt{(dh\_fit\_dx \sigma\_beam)^2 + (c/2 \sigma\_xmit)^2}$$

1358           *ii.* Add the effects of background noise to *sigma\_expected* to calculate *sigma\_PE\_est*.

1359           
$$\sigma\_PE\_est = ((N\_signal h\_expected\_RMS^2 + N\_noise(0.287 H\_win)^2) / N\_tot)^{1/2}$$

1360           *iii.* Calculate linear-fit-model errors. Multiply *h\_mean\_sigma\_unit* and  
1361 *dh\_fit\_dx\_sigma\_unit* by *max(sigma\_PE\_est, h\_rms\_misfit)* to obtain *h\_mean\_sigma* and  
1362 *dh\_fit\_dx\_sigma*.

1363   Output values assigned: *sigma\_h\_mean*, *sigma\_dh\_fit\_dx*, *sigma\_PE\_est*, *h\_rms\_misfit*.

1364           5f. Set *h\_li\_sigma* equal to the maximum of *sigma\_h\_mean* and *fpb\_med\_corr\_sigma*.

1365   Output values assigned for each beam: *h\_li\_sigma*.

1366           5g. Calculate the uncorrected reflectance, based on the first-photon-bias-corrected total  
1367 PE count. Equation given in 3.4.3.3.

1368   Output values assigned, for each beam: *r\_eff*

1369           5h. Calculate *SNR\_significance*, by interpolating into the *SNR\_F\_table* as a linear  
1370 function of the table parameters *BGR*, *SNR*, and *w\_surface\_window\_initial*.

1371   Output value assigned: *SNR\_significance*

1372           5i: calculate *atl06\_quality\_summary*: *atl06\_quality\_summary* is zero unless *h\_li\_sigma* >  
1373 1 m or *SNR\_significance* > 0.02 or *N\_fit\_photons/w\_surface\_window\_final* < 4 (for strong  
1374 beams) or <1 (for weak beams) or *signal\_selection\_source* > 1.

1375           5j: Calculate pass-through parameters: For tide parameters, error parameters, and the *dac*,  
1376 calculate ATL06 values from the average values for the ATL03 segments.

1377        5k: Calculate systematic error estimates: Based on geolocation error estimates and surface  
1378 slope, calculate *h\_li\_sigma\_systematic* based on equation 36.

## 1379    **5.5    Signal selection based on ATL03 flags**

1380    **Inputs**, from one beam only, for each PE

1381        *x\_PE*: along-track coordinates of the land-ice PE for the current segment

1382        *h\_PE*: height of PE for the current segment

1383        *Ice\_confidence\_flag*: ATL03 classification of the land-ice PE. 0=undetected, 1=PE in the  
1384 pad region, but not identified as signal PE, 2=low confidence, 3=medium confidence, 4=high  
1385 confidence.

1386    **Input**, one per segment:

1387        *x0*: the along-track location of the segment center.

1388        *BGR*: the interpolated background PE rate for the segment.

1389    **Parameters:**

1390        *Sigma\_beam*: The one-sigma expected horizontal spread of the photons on the ground.  
1391 Equal to 4.25 m (pre-launch estimate)

1392        *Sigma\_xmit*: The one-sigma temporal duration of the transmit pulse.

1393    **Outputs:**

1394        *PE\_selection*: binary flag, one per input PE, showing whether to use that PE in the initial  
1395 fit.

1396        *Signal\_selection\_source*: parameter indicating the how the signal was selected. See  
1397 Table 3-1 for values.

1398        *signal\_selection\_status\_confident*: parameter indicating the success/failure of signal  
1399 selection using low-or-better confidence PEs.

1400        *signal\_selection\_status\_all*: parameter indicating the success/failure of signal selection  
1401 using all flagged PEs.

1402        *H\_win*: Height of the window around the best-fitting line used to select PE.

1403

1404    **Procedure:**

1405    1. If the inputs are empty (no PE are in the along-track window), set *signal\_selection\_source* to  
1406 3, set *signal\_selection\_status\_confident* to 3, set *signal\_selection\_status\_all* to 3 set  
1407 *signal\_selection\_status\_backup* to 4, and return.

1408    2. Check if the confidently detected PE are adequate to define an initial segment.

1409        2a. Set *PE\_selection* to true for all PE with *Ice\_confidence\_flag* ≥ 2, to zero for all  
1410 others

1411           2b: If the difference in  $x_{PE}$  between the first and last PE in  $PE\_selection$  is less than 20  
1412 m set  $signal\_selection\_status\_confident$  to 1.

1413           2c: If there are fewer than 10 true elements in  $PE\_selection$ , but the spread between the  
1414 first and last PE in  $PE\_selection$  is greater than 20 m, set  $signal\_selection\_status\_confident$  to 2.

1415           2d. If there are fewer than 10 true elements in  $PE\_selection$ , and the spread between the  
1416 first and last PE is less than 20 m, set  $signal\_selection\_status\_confident$  to 3.

1417

1418           3. Check if the combination of confidently detected PE and the padded PE are adequate to define  
1419 an initial segment. If  $signal\_selection\_status\_confident$  is zero, skip this step.

1420           3a. Set  $PE\_selection$  to true for all PE with non-zero  $ice\_confidence\_flag$ .

1421           3b: If the difference in  $x_{PE}$  between the first and last PE in  $PE\_selection$  is less than 20  
1422 m set  $signal\_selection\_status\_all$  to 1.

1423           3c: If there are fewer than 10 true elements in  $PE\_selection$ , but the spread between the  
1424 first and last PE in  $PE\_selection$  is greater than 20 m, set  $signal\_selection\_status\_all$  to 2.

1425           3d. If there are fewer than 10 true elements in  $PE\_selection$ , and the spread between the  
1426 first and last PE is less than 20 m, set  $signal\_selection\_status\_all$  to 3.

1427           3e: If  $signal\_selection\_status\_all$  is equal to zero, set  $signal\_selection\_source$  to 1 and  
1428 proceed to step 4, otherwise set  $signal\_selection\_source$  to 2, and return.

1429           4. Calculate the vertical spread of the selected PE, make the selection consistent with a vertical  
1430 window around a sloping segment.

1431           4a. Calculate the least-squares fit line between  $(x_{PE}-x_0)$  and  $h_{PE}$  for the selected PE.  
1432 Internal variables set:  $along\_track\_slope$ ,  $seg\_center\_height$ .

1433           4b. Calculate  $r_{PE}$ , the residual between the best-fitting line and  $h_{PE}$ .

1434           4c. Calculate  $\sigma_r$ , the robust spread (accounting for noise) of  $r_{PE}$ , based on the  
1435 background density,  $BG\_density$ , with  $z\_min$  and  $z\_max$  set to the minimum and maximum  
1436 values of  $r_{PE}$ . See the **robust\_dispersion** section for description.

1437           4d. Calculate the expected PE spread,  $\sigma_{expected}$ , based on the current slope  
1438 estimate:

1439            $\sigma_{expected} = [(c/2 \sigma_{xmit})^2 + \sigma_{beam}^2 along\_track\_slope^2]^{1/2}$

1440           4e. Calculate  $H_{win}$ :

1441            $H_{win} = \max(H_{win\_min}, 6 \sigma_{expected}, 6 \sigma_r)$

1442           4f. Select all PE that have  $abs(r_{PE}) < H_{win}/2$ . Report the number of selected PE as  
1443  $N_{initial}$ .

1444           **5.6 Backup PE-selection routine.**

1445           **Inputs:**

1446         $x_{PE}$  : along-track coordinates of all PE for the current beam

1447         $h_{PE}$ : heights of all PE for the current beam

1448         $x0$ : along-track bin center for the current bin.

1449        *Ice\_confidence\_flag*: ATL03 classification of the land-ice PE. 0=undetected, 1=PE in the

1450 pad region, but not identified as signal PE, 2=low confidence, 3=medium confidence, 4=high

1451 confidence

1452        *signal\_selection\_source*: Flag indicating the how the signal was selected. See Table 3-1

1453 for values.

1454   **Outputs:**

1455        *PE\_selection*: selected PE for the current bin.

1456        *signal\_selection\_source*: Flag indicating the how the signal was selected. See Table 3-1

1457 for values, updated based on the results of this algorithm

1458        *signal\_selection\_status\_backup* flag indicating the success/failure of signal selection

1459 using backup selection algorithm

1460        *H\_win*: Vertical extent of the selected window

1461   **Internal variables:**

1462        *Test\_window\_center*: Vector of test window centers

1463        *Window\_center\_height*: Estimated window center height

1464   **Procedure:**

1465   1. Attempt to center the window on any ATL03 flagged PE that are present.

1466       1a. If any padded or detected PE are found, set  $w0$  to the maximum of 10 m and the

1467 difference between the maximum and minimum selected PE heights, and set *PE\_selection* to true

1468 for all PE that have heights within 5 m of the median of the selected PE heights. Set *H\_win*

1469 equal to 10 m.

1470       1b. If the horizontal spread in the PE marked in *PE\_selection* is greater than 20 m, and if

1471 10 or more PE are selected, then set *signal\_selection\_status\_backup* to zero, set

1472 *signal\_selection\_source* to 2, and return.

1473   2. Find the 80-m along-track by 10-m vertical bin that contains the largest number of PEs

1474       2a. Select all PE from ATL03 segments  $m-2$  to  $m+1$ , inclusive.

1475       2b. Loop over *test\_window\_center* values between  $\text{floor}(\min(h_{PE}))+0.25$  and

1476  $\text{ceil}(\max(h_{PE}))$  in 0.5 m steps. For each *test\_window\_center* value, count the PE in a 10-m

1477 (vertical) bin centered on the *test\_window\_center* value.

1478       2c. Find the maximum of the window counts,  $C_{max}$ , and calculate its uncertainty,

1479  $C_{sigma}=\text{sqrt}(C_{max})$ . If  $C_{max}$  is less than 16, then set *PE\_selection* to null (no selected PE) and

1480 skip to step 3.



1481           2d. Set *window\_center\_height* equal to the center of the range of *test\_window\_center*  
 1482 values that have a count greater than *Cmax-Csigma*. Set *H\_win* to the difference between the  
 1483 minimum and maximum of *test\_window\_center* values that have a count greater than *Cmax-*  
 1484 *Csigma*, plus 10 m.

1485           2e. Set *PE\_selection* to 1 for all PE in ATL03 segments *m-1* and *m*, with a height within  
 1486 *H\_win/2* of *window\_center\_height*.

1487       3. Evaluate the selection.

1488           3a. Set *signal\_selection\_status\_backup* to 1.

1489           3b: If the difference in *x\_PE* between the first and last PE in *PE\_selection* is less than 20  
 1490 m set *signal\_selection\_status\_backup* to 2.

1491           3c: If there are fewer than 10 true elements in *PE\_selection*, but the spread between the  
 1492 first and last PE in *PE\_selection* is greater than 20 m, set *signal\_selection\_status\_backup* to 3.

1493           3d. If there are fewer than 10 true elements in *PE\_selection*, and the spread between the  
 1494 first and last PE is less than 20 m, set *signal\_selection\_status\_backup* to 4.

1495           3e. If *signal\_selection\_status\_backup* is 1, set *signal\_selection\_source* to 2, if greater  
 1496 than 1, set *signal\_selection\_source* to 3.

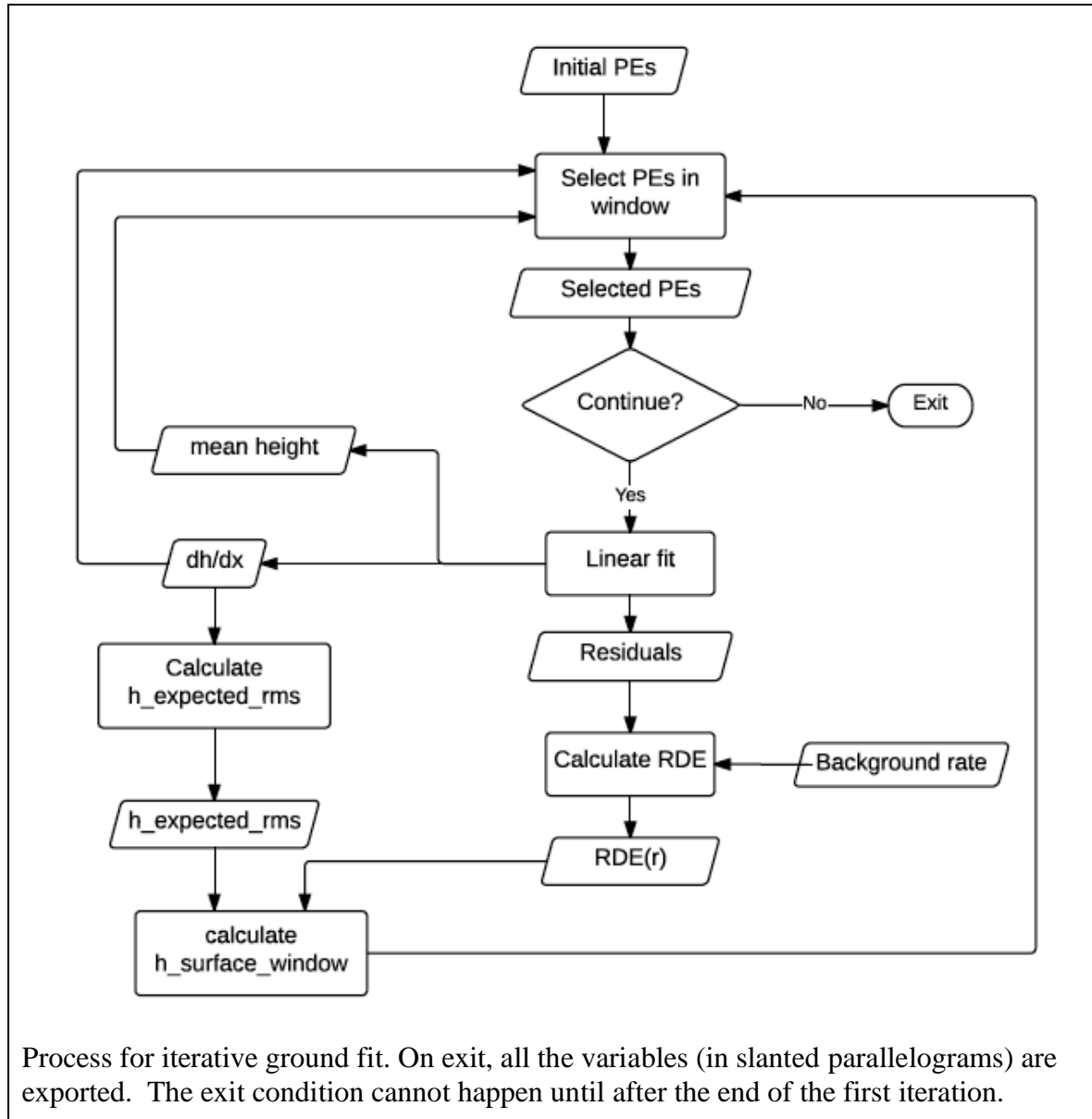
1497

## 1498   **5.7   Iterative Least-Squares Fitting Routine**

1499   This routine performs the iterative least-squares fit to refine the surface window and determine  
 1500 the along-track slope. The process for this step is shown in Figure 5-2.

Figure 5-2. Flow chart for iterative ground fit

---



1501

1502 **Inputs:**

- 1503  $x_{PE}$  : along-track coordinates of PE for the current beam
- 1504  $y_{PE}$  : across-track coordinates of PE for the current beam
- 1505  $input\_PE\_selection$ : Flag defining the PE selected by the initial selection routine
- 1506  $h_{PE}$ : heights of selected PE for the current beam
- 1507  $x0$ : along-track bin center for the current bin.
- 1508  $bckgrd$ : Interpolated background-PE rate estimate for the segment
- 1509  $H_{win}$ : Initial surface-window height.

1510        *signal\_selection\_source*: Flag indicating the source of the initial signal selection

1511        *N\_it*: maximum number of iterations

1512    **Parameters:**

1513        *Sigma\_xmit*: transmitted pulse duration (seconds)

1514        *Sigma\_beam*: sigma value for pulse surface footprint (expected to be equal to 4.25 m)

1515        *L0*: Along-track length of the window

1516        *N\_seg\_pulses*: Number of pulses in a 40-meter segment (equal to 58 assuming 7 km/s

1517        ground-track speed)

1518        *H\_win\_min*: Minimum allowed surface window height, equal to 3m.

1519    **Outputs:**

1520        *H\_win*: the height of the window around the best-fitting segment within which PE are

1521        selected.

1522        *dh\_fit\_dx*: The along-track slope of the best-fitting segment

1523        *h\_mean*: The mean-based height of the best-fitting segment

1524        *PE\_fit\_flag*: A flag indicating whether a particular PE has been selected based on the

1525        segment height and slope and *H\_win*.

1526        *r0*: Residuals to the best-fitting segment

1527        *h\_mean\_sigma\_unit*: Estimated error in *h\_mean* per unit of PE-height error

1528        *dh\_fit\_dx\_sigma\_unit*: Estimated error in *dh\_fit\_dx* per unit of PE-height error.

1529        *N\_signal* : Estimated number of signal PE

1530        *N\_BG* : Estimated number of background PE

1531        *h\_robust\_sprd* : robust spread of residuals

1532        *h\_rms\_misfit*: RMS misfit of residuals

1533        *SNR*: signal-to-noise ratio for window.

1534    **Procedure:**

1535    1. Initialize the fit.

1536        1a. If *signal\_selection\_source* is zero or 1, eliminate all PE not marked as 1 in

1537        *input\_PE\_selection*, set *PE\_fit\_flag* to 1 for all remaining PE.

1538        1b. If *signal\_selection\_source* is nonzero, Set *PE\_fit\_flag* to 1 for all PE marked in

1539        *input\_PE\_selection*, zero for all others.

1540        1c. Calculate the vertical noise-photon density:

1541                 $BG\_density = N\_seg\_pulses \text{ median}(bckgrd) / (c/2)$

1542    2. Iterate the fit.

1543           2a. Check whether enough PE are selected to define a window. If fewer than 10 PE are  
1544 selected in *PE\_fit\_flag*, set *H\_win*, *dh\_fit\_dx*, *H\_mean*, and *r0* to invalid, and return.

1545           2b. Calculate the least-squares linear fit between *h\_PE* and *x\_PE-x0* for the PE selected  
1546 in *PE\_fit\_flag*. The intercept of the fit is *h\_mean*, the slope is *dh\_fit\_dx*. Calculate the residual to  
1547 this fit for the selected PE, *r0* and for all PE, *r*. If the along-track spread between the first and  
1548 last selected PE is less than 10 m, fit for the height only, and set the along-track slope estimate to  
1549 zero.

1550           2c. Calculate *sigma\_r*, the robust spread (accounting for noise) of *r0*, based on the  
1551 background density, *BG\_density*, and current window height, *H\_win*. The variables input to the  
1552 **robust dispersion including a background estimate** routine are *z=r0*, *zmin=-H\_win/2*,  
1553 *zmax=H\_win/2*, *N\_BG=H\_win BG\_density*. If the resulting *sigma\_r* is greater than 5 m, set it to  
1554 5 m.

1555           2d. Calculate the expected PE spread, *sigma\_expected*, based on the current slope  
1556 estimate:

1557           
$$sigma\_expected = [(c/2 \sigma_{xmit})^2 + \sigma_{beam}^2 \text{along\_track\_slope}^2]^{1/2}$$

1558           2e. Save the value of *H\_win* in *H\_win\_previous*, then calculate the window height from  
1559 *sigma\_expected* and *sigma\_r*.

1560           
$$H\_win = \max(H\_win\_min, 6 \sigma\_expected, 6 \sigma\_r, 0.75 H\_win\_previous)$$

1561           2f. Save the values of *PE\_fit\_flag* in *PE\_fit\_flag\_last*.

1562           2g. Select PE within *H\_win/2* of the segment fit.

1563           
$$PE\_fit\_flag = 1 \text{ for PE with } r < H\_win/2, 0 \text{ for PE with } r > H\_win/2$$

1564           2h. Evaluate the newly selected PE. If there are fewer than 10 selected PE, or if the  
1565 along-track spread between the first and last PE is less than 20 m, set *PE\_fit\_flag* to  
1566 *PE\_fit\_flag\_last*, *H\_win* to *H\_win\_previous*, and continue to step 3.

1567           2i. If fewer than *N\_iterations* have been completed, and if the values for *PE\_fit\_flag* have  
1568 changed since the previous iteration, return to step 2a. Otherwise continue to step 3.

1569           3. Propagate the error in the fit parameters assuming unit data errors (see 3.6, with  $\sigma_{photon}=1$ ).  
1570 This gives the unit errors *h\_mean\_sigma\_unit*, *dh\_fit\_dx\_sigma\_unit*.

1571           4. Calculate the number of signal and background PE, and the SNR.

1572           
$$N\_BG = bckgrd \ H\_win \ 2/c \ N\_seg\_pulses$$

1573           
$$N\_signal = \max(0, \text{number of selected PE} - N\_BG)$$

1574           
$$SNR = N\_signal / N\_BG$$

1575           5. Calculate output error statistics:

1576           
$$h\_rms\_misfit = \text{RMS misfit of selected PE}$$

1577           
$$h\_robust\_sprd = \sigma\_r \text{ from the last iteration}$$

1578 **5.8 Robust dispersion calculation from a collection of points, not including a background**  
1579 **estimate**

1580 **Input:**

1581  $z$ : sampled values

1582 **Output:**

1583  $RDE$  : the robust dispersion estimate for  $z$ .  
1584

1585 **Procedure:**

- 1586 1. Sort  $z$ .  $z_s$  is equal to  $z$ , sorted in ascending order. Let  $N_z$  equal to the number of elements in  $z$ .
- 1587 2. Calculate an abscissa for  $z_s$ ,
  - 1588 2a. Generate  $ind$ , equal to the sequence of integers between 1 and  $N_z$ .
  - 1589 2b. Calculate  $ind\_N$ , equal to  $(ind-0.5)/N_z$ .
- 1590 3. Interpolate the percentiles of  $z$ . Interpolate the values of  $z_s$  as a function of  $ind\_N$  at values  
1591 0.16 and 0.84. Half the difference between these values is  $RDE$ .  
1592

1593 **5.9 Robust dispersion calculation from a collection of points, including a background**  
1594 **estimate**

1595 **Inputs:**

1596  $z$ : sampled values

1597  $z_{min}$ ,  $z_{max}$ : window from which the values in  $z$  are sampled

1598  $N_{BG}$ : Estimate of the number of background events between  $z_{min}$  and  $z_{max}$ .

1599 **Output:**

1600  $RDE$  : the robust dispersion estimate for  $z$ .

1601 **Parameter:**

1602  $Scale\_factor$ : equal to  $\sqrt{2}(erfinv(0.5)-erfinv(-0.5))$ , where  $erfinv()$  is the inverse error  
1603 function, or 1.3490.

1604 **Procedure:**

- 1605 1. Estimate the background rate and signal count.
  - 1606 1a.  $bckgrd$  is equal to  $N_{BG}$  divided by the difference between  $z_{max}$  and  $z_{min}$ .
  - 1607 1b.  $N_{sig}$  is equal to the number of elements in  $z$ , minus  $N_{BG}$ .
  - 1608 1c. If  $N_{sig} \leq 1$ , the  $RDE$  is equal to  $(z_{max}-z_{min})/(the\ number\ of\ elements\ in\ z)$ , and the  
1609 rest of the calculation is skipped.

1610 2. Sort  $z$ .  $z_s$  is equal to  $z$ , sorted in ascending order. Let  $N_z$  equal to the number of elements in  $z$ .  
 1611 3. Calculate an abscissa for  $z_s$ . Generate  $ind$ , equal to the sequence of integers between 1 and  $N_z$ ,  
 1612 minus 0.5.  
 1613 4. Find the indices for the smallest potential percentiles of  $z$ .  
 1614 4a.  $i0$  is equal to the index of the greatest value of  $ind$  for which  $ind < (0.25N_{sig} + (z_s -$   
 1615  $z_{min})bckgrd)$ .  
 1616 4b.  $i1$  is equal to the index of the smallest value of  $ind$  for which  $ind > (0.75N_{sig} + (z_s -$   
 1617  $z_{min})bckgrd)$ .  
 1618 5. If  $i1 < i0$ , reselect  $i0$  and  $i1$  to measure spread of the central  $N_{sig}/2$  values of the distribution:  
 1619 5a:  $i0$  is equal to the index of the greatest value of  $ind$  for which  $ind < N_z/2 - N_{sig}/4$ .  
 1620 5b:  $i1$  is equal to the index of the smallest value of  $ind$  for which  $ind > N_z/2 + N_{sig}/4$ .  
 1621 6. Calculate  $RDE$ .  $RDE$  is equal to the difference between the  $z_s$  values at  $i0$  and  $i1$ , divided by  
 1622  $scale\_factor$ .

#### 1623 **5.10 First- Photon Bias Correction**

1624 These routines calculate the first-photon bias for a collection of residual photon heights. Most of  
 1625 the calculation is done as a function of time, and the results are converted back to height at the  
 1626 end of the routine.

1627

#### 1628 **Inputs:**

1629  $r\_p$ : PE heights, corrected for the along-track segment fit, converted to time (multiplied by  $-2/c$ )  
 1630  $N\_seg\_pulses$ : the number of pulses in the segment  
 1631  $N\_px$ : the number of pixels in the detector.

1632

#### 1633 **Outputs:**

1634  $G\_est$ : the estimated detector gain  
 1635  $N\_hist$ : The uncorrected PE count histogram (in units of PE)  
 1636  $N\_PEcorr$ : the estimated PE count histogram (in units of PE)  
 1637  $t\_full$ : the time vector for the PE count histogram.  
 1638  $FPB\_med\_corr$ : the FPB correction to the median height  
 1639  $Sigma\_FPB\_med\_corr$ : the error estimate for  $FPB\_med\_corr$   
 1640  $FPB\_mean\_corr$ : The FPB correction to the mean height  
 1641  $FPB\_mean\_corr\_sigma$ : the error estimate for  $FPB\_mean\_corr$ .  
 1642  $Fpb\_N\_photons$ : the FPB-corrected estimate of the number of PE in the return.

1643

1644 **Parameters:**

1645  $t_{dead}$  : the mean detector dead time for the beam.

1646  $N_{seg\_pulses}$ : the number of pulses in the segment

1647  $N_{px}$ : the number of pixels in the detector.

1648  $dt$ : duration of a histogram bin.

1649

1650 **Procedure:**

1651

1652 *1. Generate a residual histogram*

1653 Convert PE height residuals to time residuals (multiply by  $-2/c$ ). Generate a histogram of time  
1654 residuals,  $N_{hist}$ , in bins of size  $dt$ .

1655 *2. Calculate the gain from the histogram*

1656  $P_{dead}$  for bin  $i$  is the sum over bins  $i-N_{dead}$  to  $i-1$  of  $N_{hist}$ , divided by  $N_{seg\_pulses} N_{px}$ .

1657  $G_{est}$  is equal to  $1 - P_{dead}$ , where  $N_{dead}$  is the deadtime expressed in histogram bins.

1658 *3. Check if the correction is valid. If the minimum value for  $G_{est}$  is less than  $2/(N_{seg\_pulses}$   
1659  $N_{px})$ , set all return values equal to invalid (NaN) and return.*

1660 *4. Calculated the corrected histogram:*

1661  $N_{PEcorr}$  is equal to  $N_{hist}$  divided by  $G_{est}$ .

1662 *5. Calculate height statistics*

1663 Calculate the gain-corrected mean and median and their errors for the segment, based on the full  
1664 gain estimate and the full histogram:

1665  $FPB_{med\_corr}$ :  $-1/2c$  times the gain-corrected median time based on  $N_{PE}$  and  $G_{est}$ . See  
1666 5.11.

1667  $\Sigma_{FPB_{med\_corr}}$ : the error estimate for  $FPB_{med\_corr}$

1668  $FPB_{mean\_corr}$ :  $-1/2c$  times the gain-corrected mean time based on  $N_{PE}$  and  $G_{est}$ . See 5.12.

1669  $FPB_{mean\_corr\_sigma}$ : the error estimate for  $FPB_{mean\_corr}$ .

1670  $Fpb\_N_{photons}$ : the sum of  $N_{PEcorr}$ .

1671

1672

1673 **5.11 Gain-corrected median**

1674 Inputs:

1675  $N$ : The uncorrected histogram

1676  $G$ : The gain estimate,  
 1677  $x$ : the abscissa for the bin centers, corresponding to  $N$  and  $G$ .

1678

1679 Outputs:

1680  $x_{med}$ : the median of  $N$  based on  $G$

1681  $\sigma_{x_{med}}$ : the error in  $x_{med}$

1682

1683 **Procedure:**

1684 1. Calculate the corrected histogram:

1685  $N_{corr}$  is equal to  $N$  divided by  $G$ .

1686

1687 2. Calculate the CDF of  $N_{corr}$

1688 The CDF,  $C$ , is calculated at the bin centers, and at each bin center,  $j$ , is equal to the sum of all  
 1689 values of  $N_{corr}$  for bin centers  $i < j$ .  $C$  is normalized so that its last value is equal to 1.

1690

1691 3. Calculate the 40<sup>th</sup>, 50<sup>th</sup>, and 60<sup>th</sup> percentiles of  $N_{corr}$

1692  $C$  is treated as a function that increases linearly across each bin, such that the upper edge of the  
 1693  $i$ th bin is greater than the lower edge of the  $i$ th bin by  $N_i$ . The abscissa for  $C$  runs from zero at  
 1694  $x_l - dx/2$ , to  $x_m + dx/2$ , where  $x_l$  is the first bin center,  $x_m$  is the last bin center, and  $dx$  is the spacing  
 1695 between bin centers. The 40<sup>th</sup>, 50<sup>th</sup>, and 60<sup>th</sup> percentiles of  $N_{corr}$  are calculated by interpolating  
 1696 into the vector of bin edges as a function of  $C$ . If more than one bin has a CDF within numerical  
 1697 precision of the calculated percentile, report the mean  $x$  value of all such bins.

1698

1699 4. Calculate the error in the CDF at the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile

1700 The error in any value of  $N_{corr}$  ( $\sigma_{N_{corr}}$ ) is the inverse gain value for that bin times the  
 1701 square root of  $N$  for that bin.  $\sigma_{CDF}$  for any  $x$  is found by calculating the RSS of all  
 1702  $\sigma_{N_{corr}}$  values for bins less than  $x$ , and dividing by the sum of  $N_{corr}$ .

1703 The value for  $\sigma_{CDF}$  at the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile is found by interpolating  $\sigma_{CDF}$  as a  
 1704 function of  $C$  at a  $C$  value of 0.5.

1705

1706 5. calculate  $\sigma_{x_{med}}$

1707  $\sigma_{x_{med}}$  is found:

$$\sigma_{x_{med}} = \frac{dz_{60} - dz_{40}}{0.2} \sigma_{cdf}(dz_{med})$$



1708

1709 Here  $d_{z60}$  and  $d_{z40}$  are the 40<sup>th</sup> and 60<sup>th</sup> percentiles of  $N_{corr}$  from step 3.

1710

## 1711 **5.12 Gain-corrected mean**

1712 Inputs

1713  $N$ : The uncorrected histogram

1714  $G$ : The gain estimate

1715  $x$ : the abscissa for the bin centers, corresponding to  $N$  and  $G$ .

1716

### 1717 **Outputs:**

1718  $x_{mean}$ : the mean of  $N$  based on  $G$

1719  $sigma\_x\_mean$ : the error in  $x_{mean}$

1720

1721 1. Calculate the corrected histogram:

1722  $N_{corr}$  is equal to  $N$  divided by  $G$ .

1723

1724 2. Calculate the corrected mean:

1725 Calculate the mean:

$$x_{mean} = \sum \frac{N_{corr,i}}{N_{tot}} x_i$$

1726

1727 3. Calculate the error in the corrected histogram:

$$\sigma_{N,corr,i} = \frac{N_{0,i}^{1/2}}{G_i}$$

1728

1729 4. Calculate the error in the corrected mean:

$$sigma\_x\_mean = \left[ \sum \left( \sigma_{N,corr,i} \frac{x_i - x_{mean}}{N_{corr,tot}} \right)^2 \right]^{1/2}$$

49

1730

### 1731 5.13 Transmit-pulse-shape correction

1732 This routine uses the most recent estimate of the transmit-pulse shape calculated from the  
1733 transmitter-echo pulse to calculate median and mean offsets for a windowed, truncated received  
1734 pulse. This correction depends the shape of the transmit pulse, and on three parameters that are  
1735 unique to each segment: the estimated width of the return pulse, the refined surface-window  
1736 height, and the signal-to-noise ratio.

1737

#### 1738 **Inputs:**

1739 -Transmit-pulse-shape estimate ( $t_{tx}$ ,  $P_{tx}$ ). The time vector,  $t_{tx}$  is shifted so that  $P_{tx}$  has a  
1740 zero centroid (see 5.15).

1741 -Received-pulse width estimate ( $W_{rx}$ )

1742 -Surface-window time duration ( $dt_W$ )

1743 -Signal-to-noise ratio estimate within the truncated window ( $SNR$ )

#### 1744 **Outputs:**

1745 Height offsets for the mean and median transmit-pulse-shape correction.

1746

#### 1747 **Procedure:**

1748 This correction works by generating a synthetic return pulse that matches the width of the actual  
1749 return pulse, and truncating it in the same way that the return pulse has been truncated. The  
1750 median and the mean of the synthetic pulse are then calculated.

1751

1752 *1. Calculate the time by which the received pulse was broadened*

1753 The spreading needed to broaden the transmitted pulse to match the received pulse is equal to  
1754  $W_{spread} = \sqrt{\max(0.01e^{-9^2}, W_{RX}^2 - W_{TX}^2)}$ .

1755

1756 *2. Generate a synthetic received pulse*

1757 *2a: Calculate the shape of the expected spread pulse:*

1758 The synthetic received pulse is generated by convolving the transmitted pulse with a Gaussian  
1759 function of with a sigma parameter equal to  $W_{spread}$ . The Gaussian should have enough  
1760 samples to include at least  $4 * W_{spread}$  worth of samples on either side of its center. The  
1761 synthetic pulse and its time vector are  $N_{hist\_synthetic}$  and  $t_{synthetic}$ .

1762

1763 *2b: Calculate the median of the broadened synthetic pulse:*

1764 Calculate the median of the synthetic received pulse,  $t_{synthetic\_med}$ , and set  
1765  $t_{ctr} = t_{synthetic\_med}$ .

1766

1767 *2c: Normalize the waveform and add an estimated noise signal:*

1768  *$N_{hist\_synthetic}$  is normalized so that its sum is equal to 1, and a background count of  $1/SNR$*

1769  *$(dt/dt\_W)$  is added to  $N_{hist\_synthetic}$ .*

1770

1771 *3. Calculate the centroid of the synthetic received pulse*

1772 To find the centroid of the truncated synthetic waveform, an iterative procedure is used:

1773 *3a: Calculate the centroid of the synthetic waveform*

1774  *$t\_ctr$  is set to the centroid of the truncated synthetic received waveform, windowed by  $t\_ctr -$*

1775  *$dt\_W/2$  and  $t\_ctr + dt\_W/2$*

1776 *3b: Check for convergence and iterate*

1777 Unless the current and previous values of  $t\_ctr$  are consistent to within 0.1 mm (0.00067 ns) or if

1778 50 iterations are complete, return to 4a.

1779

1780 *4. Calculate the median of the synthetic received pulse*

1781 The median of the synthetic received waveform is calculated the synthetic received waveform

1782 from 4b, windowed by  $t\_ctr - dt\_W/2$  and  $t\_ctr + dt\_W/2$

1783

1784 5. The corrections for the median and mean heights are equal to  $c/2$  times the median and mean  
1785 time offsets.

## 1786 **5.14 Residual\_histogram calculation**

### 1787 **Inputs:**

1788 *Segment\_lat* : latitude for each segment center

1789 *Segment\_lon* : longitude for each segment center

1790 *Segment\_x\_ATC*: along-track (x) coordinate for each segment center

1791 *Segment\_h\_mean*: mean-based land-ice height for each segment center

1792 *Segment\_slope*: along-track slope for each segment center

1793 *Segment\_SNR*: SNR values for segment fits

1794 *Segment\_BGR*: Background rate estimate for each segment

1795 *N\_seg\_pulses* Number of pulses in each segment (including those contributing no PE to the fit).

1796 *x\_pe*: along-track(x) coordinates for all ATL03 PE in the segment

1797 *h\_pe*: ATL03 surface height for all PE in the segment.

### 1798 **Parameters:**

1799        *N\_hist*: Number of groups of segments in the histogram (number of horizontal divisions)

1800        *N\_bins*: Number of vertical bins in the residual histogram

1801        *bin\_top\_h*: Tops of the histogram bins, listed from bottom to top

1802    **Outputs:**

1803        *Count*: *N\_bins* x *N\_hist*-element array giving the number of residual photons in each bin  
 1804        (*N\_bins* is the vertical dimension, *N\_hist* is the horizontal dimension)

1805        *bckgrd\_per\_m*: 1x*N\_hist*-vector giving the expected background count per vertical  
 1806        meter in each column of the histogram based on the observed background rate (*bckgrd*) and the  
 1807        number of segments included in the histogram

1808        *Segment\_id\_list*: 10 x *N\_hist*-element array list of segment IDs included in the histogram

1809        *Lat\_mean*: *N\_hist*-element list giving the mean latitude of all segments included in each  
 1810        horizontal histogram bin

1811        *Lon\_mean*: *N\_hist*-element list giving the mean longitude of all segments included in  
 1812        each horizontal histogram bin

1813        *x\_ATC\_mean*: *N\_hist*-element list giving the mean along-track (x) coordinate of all  
 1814        segments included in each horizontal histogram bin

1815    **Procedure**

1816    1. Calculate the bin-edge heights. There are *N\_bins*+1 edges. The second through last edges are  
 1817    equal to the input *bin\_top\_h* values. The first (lowest) edge is 1 m lower than the second (i.e.  
 1818    equal to the first value of *bin\_top\_h* -1).

1819    2. Group segment centers into 10-segment groups: For each RGT, segments 1-10 would be in the  
 1820    first group, 11-20 in the second, etc.

1821    3. For each group, gather all valid segments that have high-quality surface-height estimates  
 1822    (*ATL06\_quality\_summary*=0). If any high-quality segments are present, calculate the histogram  
 1823    count. Otherwise, report the histogram count as all zeros, and report *lat\_mean*,  
 1824    *lon\_mean*, *x\_atc\_mean*, and *segment\_id\_list* as invalid.

1825        3a. For each valid segment, calculate the histogram and background count.

1826            3a.1: Gather the PE that have  $x_{segment} - 10 \text{ m} < x_{pe} \leq 10 \text{ m}$ .

1827            3a.2: Calculate the residual between the segment and the gathered PE:  $r = h_{mean\_segment} - (x_{pe} - segment\_x\_ATC) \times segment\_slope$ .  
 1828             $h_{mean\_segment} - (x_{pe} - segment\_x\_ATC) \times segment\_slope$ .

1829            3a.3: For each vertical bin in the histogram, count the PE with residuals that fall  
 1830            into the bin

1831            3a.4: For each valid segment, add the expected background count per vertical  
 1832            meter, as estimated from the segment background count to the total background-per-meter  
 1833            (*bckgrd\_per\_m*) for the segment. The contribution for each segment is:  $segment\_BGR \times$   
 1834             $N_{seg\_pulses} / 2 / (c/2)$ . [N.B. The factors of 2 in the previous statement cancel, leaving :  
 1835             $segment\_BGR \times N_{seg\_pulses} / c$ .]

- 1836           3b. Add the segment histograms together to calculate the 10-segment histogram
- 1837           3c. Calculate the mean values for latitude, longitude, and  $x_{ATC}$  for the segment. List
- 1838 the selected segments in *segment\_id\_list*

## 1840 **5.15 Transmit-echo-pulse initialization**

1841 This calculation centers the transmit-echo-pulse reported by ATL03 on its centroid, after using

1842 an iterative edit to distinguish between signal and noise. It should be performed each time a new

1843 night-time TEP estimate of the waveform becomes available. The TEP consists of the power

1844 (*tep\_hist*) and time (*tep\_hist\_x*) that are input from ATL03. Two TEP histograms are available,

1845 obtained for laser spot 1 and 3. The ATL03 *tep\_valid\_spot* parameter specifies with which TEP

1846 histogram is used for each of the ground tracks, and the ATL03 *tep\_range\_prim* parameter

1847 specifies the valid range of times for each TEP histogram.

### 1848 **Inputs:**

- 1849 *-tep\_hist\_x* : Time for the Transmit-pulse-shape estimate
- 1850 *-tep\_hist*: power (or signal count) for the transmit-pulse-shape estimate

1851 The time-sampling interval these is *dt\_input*. The transmit pulse is sampled so that at least the

1852 first 5 ns and the last 10 ns are representative of the background noise for the transmit pulse.

### 1853 **Outputs:**

- 1854 *-t\_tx*: time vector for the transmit pulse estimate, shifted such that  $P_{tx}$  has a zero centroid
- 1855 *-P\_tx*: Power for the transmit-pulse estimate,

### 1856 **Algorithm:**

- 1857 1. *Identify noise-only and signal samples:* mark index *noise\_samples* as true for the first 5 ns
- 1858 and last 10 ns of samples in *tep\_hist*. Set *sig\_samples* to the inverse of *noise\_samples*
- 1859 2. *Calculate the noise value for the transmit pulse:*  $N_{tx}$  = the mean of *tep\_hist* for the samples
- 1860 in *noise\_samples*. Subtract  $N_{tx}$  from *tep\_hist* to give  $P_{tx}$ .
- 1861 3. *Calculate the centroid of the transmit pulse:*  $T0_{tx} = \text{sum}(P_{tx} * t_{tx}) / \text{sum}(P_{tx})$ . The sum
- 1862 is carried out over the samples in *sig\_samples*.
- 1863 4. *Calculate the RDE of the transmit pulse:* The width of the transmitted pulse ( $W_{TX}$ ) is equal
- 1864 to half the difference between the 84<sup>th</sup> percentile and the 16<sup>th</sup> percentile of the portion of  $P_{tx}$  in
- 1865 *sig\_samples*.
- 1866 5. *Re-establish the noise-only samples:* mark *noise\_samples* as true for all samples with times
- 1867 more than 6  $W_{TX}$  away from  $T0_{tx}$ , set *sig\_samples* to the inverse if *noise\_samples*. If
- 1868 *sig\_samples* has changed from its previous values, and if fewer than 10 iterations have taken
- 1869 place, return to 1b.
- 1870 6. *Center the transmit pulse on its centroid:* Subtract  $T0_{tx}$  from  $t_{tx\_input}$  to give  $t_{tx}$ .

1872

1873   **6   TEST DATA AND SOFTWARE REQUIREMENTS**

1874   This section describes a very simple test data set that has been derived to verify the performance  
1875   of the ATL06 surface code.

1876   **6.1   ATL06 Test Data Setup**

1877   The ATL06 test data are a set of synthetic data generated based on a planar, sloping surface with  
1878   a slope of 0.02. Separate data sets are generated for surface reflectance values between 1/16 and  
1879   1, and for surface roughness values between zero and 2 m. A detector model with a dead time of  
1880   3.2 ns is used to simulate the effects of the first-photon bias. For each segment, a full set of  
1881   ATL06 parameters are generated using the Matlab prototype code, and with the ASAS  
1882   production code, and the two are compared. Small numerical differences between the codes can  
1883   produce different results in the early stages of the signal-finding code, so the most valid  
1884   comparisons between the results of the two codes are for segments with moderate signal strength  
1885   (reflectance greater than 0.25). We consider the two codes to produce equally valid results when  
1886   the difference between the results for any parameter is not significantly different from zero, and  
1887   when the spreads of the two sets of parameters are not significantly different from one another  
1888   for segments based on the same number of photons with the same surface window size.

## 7 BROWSE PRODUCTS AND Q/A STATISTICS

### 7.1 Browse Products

Browse products include two kinds of plots: Data-quality maps, and profile plots.

Data-quality maps are based on the *signal\_selection\_source* parameter. Each map shows a background image based on the MODIS mosaics of Greenland or Antarctica (Scambos and others, 2007), with color-coded points showing the mean segment location for each kilometer of the beam track, with the color showing the largest bit in *signal\_selection\_source* that is set for more than 50% of all segments in that kilometer of data, assuming that for segments with no data, all bits are set. The plots are made separately for the strong and weak beams, because the two beams are, at the granule scale, very close to one another and would otherwise overlap.

Profile plots are generated separately for each beam pair in the granule. Each plot shows the surface height as a function of along-track distance, and the height for each beam in the pair. A second set of axes, aligned with the first, shows the number of PE per segment ( $N_{fit\_photons}$ ) and the height error estimate,  $h_{li\_sigma}$ .

### 7.2 Q/A Statistics

Quality assessment statistics are provided for each beam, for each 10-km increment along track. For each increment we provide:

A synopsis of the *signal\_selection\_source* parameter:

- The fraction of possible segments with *signal\_selection\_source* equal to zero.
- The fraction of segments with *signal\_selection\_source* equal to 1.
- The fraction of segments with *signal\_selection\_source* equal to 2.
- The fraction of segments with *signal\_selection\_source* equal to 3.

[Add parameters for the entire file]



1914    **8    APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY**

1915    This appendix defines terms that are used in ATLAS ATBDs, as derived from a document  
1916    circulated to the SDT, written by Tom Neunann. Some naming conventions are borrowed from  
1917    **Spots, Channels and Redundancy Assignments** (ICESat-2-ATSYS-TN-0910) by P. Luers.  
1918    Some conventions are different than those used by the ATLAS team for the purposes of making  
1919    the data processing and interpretation simpler.

1920

1921    **Spots.** The ATLAS instrument creates six spots on the ground, three that are weak and three that  
1922    are strong, where strong is defined as approximately four times brighter than weak. These  
1923    designations apply to both the laser-illuminated spots and the instrument fields of view. The  
1924    spots are numbered as shown in Figure 1. At times, the weak spots are leading (when the  
1925    direction of travel is in the ATLAS +x direction) and at times the strong spots are leading.  
1926    However, the spot number does not change based on the orientation of ATLAS. The spots are  
1927    always numbered with 1L on the far left and 3R on the far right of the pattern. Not: beams,  
1928    footprints.

1929

1930    **Laser pulse (pulse for short).** Individual pulses of light emitted from the ATLAS laser are  
1931    called laser pulses. As the pulse passes through the ATLAS transmit optics, this single pulse is  
1932    split into 6 individual transmit pulses by the diffractive optical element. The 6 pulses travel to  
1933    the earth's surface (assuming ATLAS is pointed to the earth's surface). Some attributes of a laser  
1934    pulse are the wavelength, pulse shape and duration. Not: transmit pulse, laser shot, laser fire.

1935

1936    **Laser Beam.** The sequential laser pulses emitted from the ATLAS instrument that illuminate  
1937    spots on the earth's surface are called laser beams. ATLAS generates 6 laser beams. The laser  
1938    beam numbering convention follows the ATLAS instrument convention with strong beams  
1939    numbered 1, 3, and 5 and weak beams numbered 2, 4, and 6 as shown in the figures. Not:  
1940    beamlet.

1941

1942    **Transmit Pulse.** Individual pulses of light emitted from the ICESat-2 observatory are called  
1943    transmit pulses. The ATLAS instrument generates 6 transmit pulses of light from a single laser  
1944    pulse. The transmit pulses generate 6 spots where the laser light illuminates the surface of the  
1945    earth. Some attributes of a given transmit pulse are the wavelength, the shape, and the energy.  
1946    Some attributes of the 6 transmit pulses may be different. Not: laser fire, shot, laser shot, laser  
1947    pulse.

1948

1949    **Reflected Pulse.** Individual transmit pulses reflected off the surface of the earth and viewed by  
1950    the ATLAS telescope are called reflected pulses. For a given transmit pulse, there may or may  
1951    not be a reflected pulse. Not: received pulse, returned pulse.

1952

1953 **Photon Event.** Some of the energy in a reflected pulse passes through the ATLAS receiver  
1954 optics and electronics. ATLAS detects and time tags some fraction of the photons that make up  
1955 the reflected pulse, as well as background photons due to sunlight or instrument noise. Any  
1956 photon that is time tagged by the ATLAS instrument is called a photon event, regardless of  
1957 source. Not: received photon, detected photon.

1958

1959 **Reference Ground Track (RGT).** The reference ground track (RGT) is the track on the earth at  
1960 which a specified unit vector within the observatory is pointed. Under nominal operating  
1961 conditions, there will be no data collected along the RGT, as the RGT is spanned by GT2L and  
1962 GT2R (which are not shown in the figures, but are similar to the GTs that are shown). During  
1963 spacecraft slews or off-pointing, it is possible that ground tracks may intersect the RGT. The  
1964 precise unit vector has not yet been defined. The ICESat-2 mission has 1387 RGTs, numbered  
1965 from 0001xx to 1387xx. The last two digits refer to the cycle number. Not: ground tracks, paths,  
1966 sub-satellite track.

1967

1968 **Cycle Number.** Over 91 days, each of the 1387 RGTs will be targeted in the polar regions once.  
1969 In subsequent 91-day periods, these RGTs will be targeted again. The cycle number tracks the  
1970 number of 91-day periods that have elapsed since the ICESat-2 observatory entered the science  
1971 orbit. The first 91-day cycle is numbered 01, the second 91-day cycle is 02, and so on. At the  
1972 end of the first 3 years of operations, we expect the cycle number to be 12. The cycle number  
1973 will be carried in the mid-latitudes, though the same RGTs will (in general) not be targeted more  
1974 than once.

1975

1976 **Sub-satellite Track (SST).** The sub-satellite track (SST) is the time-ordered series of latitude  
1977 and longitude points at the geodetic nadir of the ICESat-2 observatory. In order to protect the  
1978 ATLAS detectors from damage due to specular returns, and the natural variation of the position  
1979 of the observatory with respect to the RGT throughout the orbit, the SST is generally not the  
1980 same as the RGT. Not: reference ground track, ground track.

1981

1982 **Ground Tracks (GT).** As ICESat-2 orbits the earth, sequential transmit pulses illuminate six  
1983 ground tracks on the surface of the earth. The track width is approximately 10m wide. Each  
1984 ground track is numbered, according to the laser spot number that generates a given ground  
1985 track. Ground tracks are therefore always numbered with 1L on the far left of the spot pattern  
1986 and 3R on the far right of the spot pattern. Not: tracks, paths, reference ground tracks, footpaths.

1987

1988 **Reference Pair Track (RPT).** The reference pair track is the imaginary line half-way between  
1989 the planned locations of the strong and weak ground tracks that make up a pair. There are three  
1990 RPTs: RPT1 is spanned by GT1L and GT1R, RPT2 is spanned by GT2L and GT2R (and may be  
1991 coincident with the RGT at times), RPT3 is spanned by GT3L and GT3R. Note that this is the  
1992 planned location of the midway point between GTs. We will not know this location very  
1993 precisely prior to launch. Not: tracks, paths, reference ground tracks, footpaths, pair tracks.

1994

1995 **Pair Track (PT).** The pair track is the imaginary line half way between the actual locations of  
1996 the strong and weak ground tracks that make up a pair. There are three PTs: PT1 is spanned by  
1997 GT1L and GT1R, PT2 is spanned by GT2L and GT2R (and may be coincident with the RGT at  
1998 times), PT3 is spanned by GT3L and GT3R. Note that this is the actual location of the midway  
1999 point between GTs, and will be defined by the actual location of the GTs. Not: tracks, paths,  
2000 reference ground tracks, footpaths, reference pair tracks.

2001

2002 **Pairs.** When considered together, individual strong and weak ground tracks form a pair. For  
2003 example, GT2L and GT2R form the central pair of the array. The pairs are numbered 1 through  
2004 3: Pair 1 is comprised of GT1L and GT1R, pair 2 is comprised of GT2L and GT2R, and pair 3 is  
2005 comprised of GT3L and 3R.

2006

2007 **Along-track.** The direction of travel of the ICESat-2 observatory in the orbit frame is defined as  
2008 the along-track coordinate, and is denoted as the +x direction. The positive x direction is  
2009 therefore along the Earth-Centered Earth-Fixed velocity vector of the observatory. Each pair has  
2010 a unique coordinate system, with the +x direction aligned with the Reference Pair Tracks.

2011

2012 **Across-track.** The across-track coordinate is y and is positive to the left, with the origins at the  
2013 Reference Pair Tracks.

2014

2015 **Segment.** An along-track span (or aggregation) of PE data from a single ground track or other  
2016 defined track is called a segment. A segment can be measured as a time duration (e.g. from the  
2017 time of the first PE to the time of the last PE), as a distance (e.g. the distance between the  
2018 location of the first and last PEs), or as an accumulation of a desired number of photons.  
2019 Segments can be as short or as long as desired.

2020

2021 **Signal Photon.** Any photon event that an algorithm determines to be part of the reflected pulse.

2022

2023 **Background Photon.** Any photon event that is not classified as a signal photon is classified as a  
2024 background photon. Background photons could be due to noise in the ATLAS instrument (e.g.  
2025 stray light, or detector dark counts), sunlight, or mis-classified signal photons. Not: noise  
2026 photon.

2027

2028 **h\_\*\*.** Signal photons will be used by higher-level products to determine height above the  
2029 WGS-84 reference ellipsoid, using a semi-major axis (equatorial radius) of 6378137m and a  
2030 flattening of 1/298.257223563. This can be abbreviated as ‘ellipsoidal height’ or ‘height above  
2031 ellipsoid’. These heights are denoted by h; the subscript \*\* will refer to the specific algorithm

2032 used to determine that elevation (e.g. is = ice sheet algorithm, si = sea ice algorithm, etc...). Not:  
2033 elevation.

2034

2035 **Photon Cloud.** The collection of all telemetered photon time tags in a given segment is the (or  
2036 a) photon cloud. Not: point cloud.

2037

2038 **Background Count Rate.** The number of background photons in a given time span is the  
2039 background count rate. Therefore a value of the background count rate requires a segment of PEs  
2040 and an algorithm to distinguish signal and background photons. Not: Noise rate, background  
2041 rate.

2042

2043 **Noise Count Rate.** The rate at which the ATLAS instrument receives photons in the absence of  
2044 any light entering the ATLAS telescope or receiver optics. The noise count rate includes PEs  
2045 due to detector dark counts or stray light from within the instrument. Not: noise rate,  
2046 background rate, background count rate.

2047

2048 **Telemetry band.** The subset of PEs selected by the science algorithm on board ATLAS to be  
2049 telemetered to the ground is called the telemetry band. The width of the telemetry band is a  
2050 function of the signal to noise ratio of the data (calculated by the science algorithm onboard  
2051 ATLAS), the location on the earth (e.g. ocean, land, sea ice, etc...), and the roughness of the  
2052 terrain, among other parameters. The widths of telemetry bands are adjustable on-orbit. The  
2053 telemetry band width is described in Section 7 or the ATLAS Flight Science Receiver  
2054 Algorithms document. The total volume of telemetred photon events must meet the data volume  
2055 constraint (currently 577 GBits/day).

2056

2057 **Window, Window Width, Window Duration.** A subset of the telemetry band of PEs is called a  
2058 window. If the vertical extent of a window is defined in terms of distance, the window is said to  
2059 have a width. If the vertical extent of a window is defined in terms of time, the window is said to  
2060 have a duration. The window width is always less than or equal to the telemetry band.

2061

Figure 8-1. Spots and tracks, forward flight

---

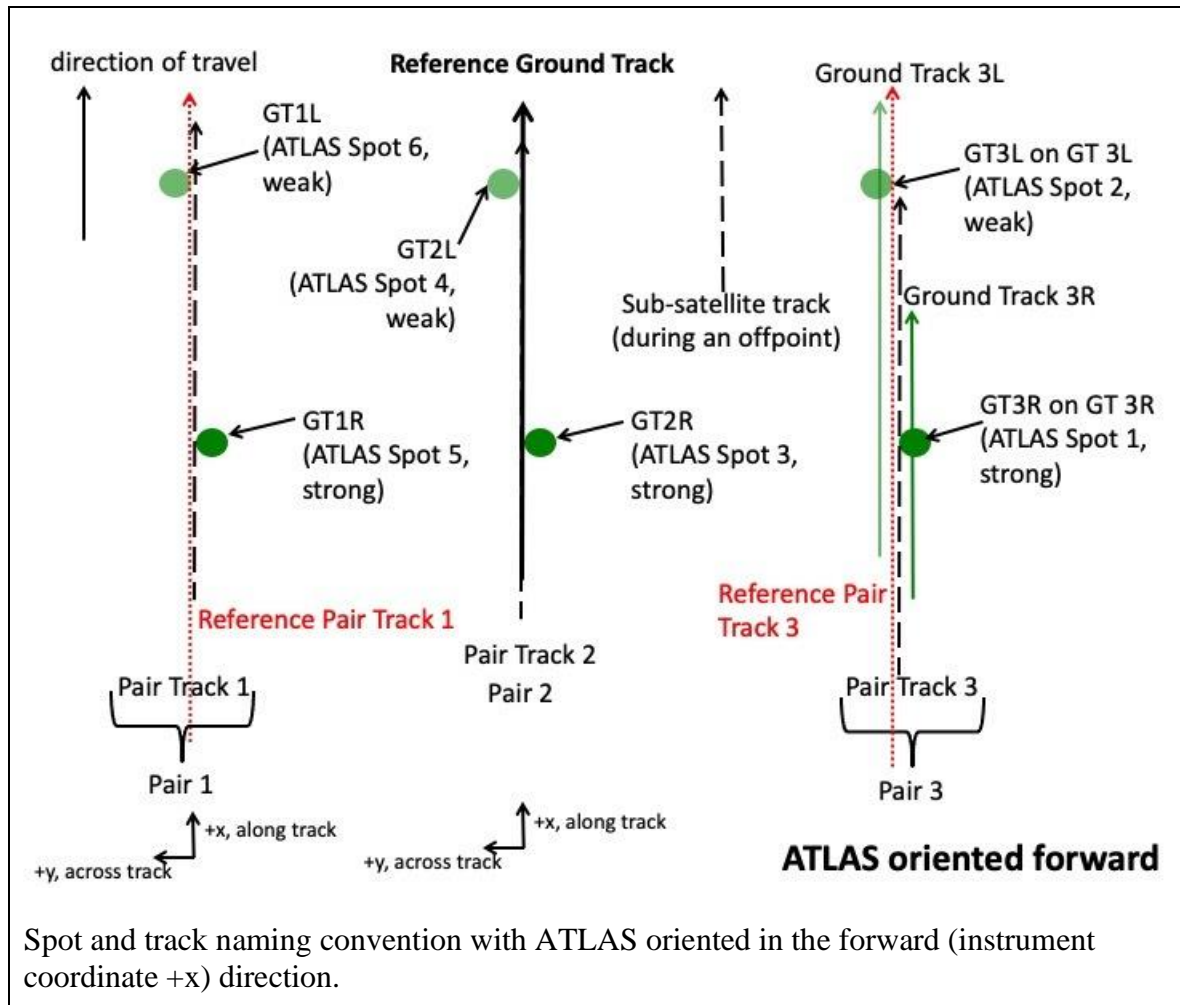
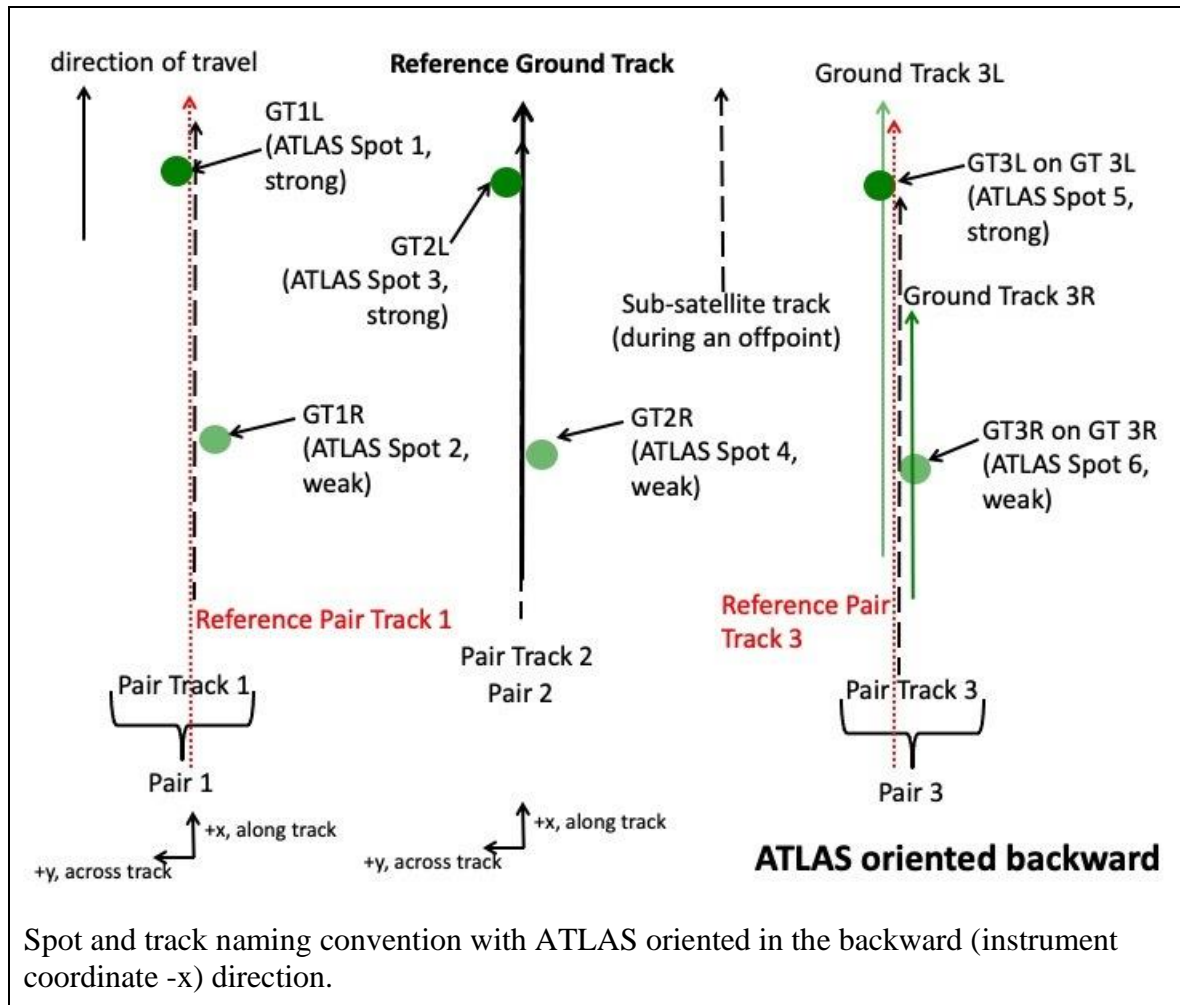


Figure 8-2. Spots and tracks, forward flight



2065

**Glossary/Acronyms**

ASAS	ATLAS Science Algorithm Software
ATBD	Algorithm Theoretical Basis Document
ATLAS	ATLAS Advance Topographic Laser Altimeter System
CDF	Cumulative Distribution Function
DEM	Digital Elevation Model
GSFC	Goddard Space Flight Center
GTs	Ground Tracks
ICESat-2	Ice, Cloud, and Land Elevation Satellite-2
MABEL	Multiple altimeter Beam Experimental Lidar
MIS	Management Information System
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
PE	Photon Event
POD	Precision Orbit Determination
PPD	Precision Pointing Determination
PRD	Precise Range Determination
PSO	ICESat-2 Project Science Office
PTs	Pair Tracks
RDE	Robust Dispersion Estimate
RGT	Reference Ground Track
RMS	Root Mean Square
RPTs	Reference Pair Tracks
RT	Real Time
SCoRe	Signature Controlled Request

SIPS ICESat-2 Science Investigator-led Processing System

TBD To Be Determined

TL/DR Too Long/Didn't Read.



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